

Cabinet

Dorset County Council



Date of Meeting	1 February 2017
Cllr Deborah Croney – Cabinet Member for Children’s Services Sara Tough – Director for Children’s Services	
Subject of Report	Consideration of the Proposals to implement a Regional Adoption Agency (RAA)
Executive Summary	<p>This report seeks Cabinet approval to join with Bournemouth Borough Council, the Borough of Poole and Families for Children to create a Regional Adoption Agency – Aspire Adoption. It is proposed that Bournemouth will host the new agency.</p> <p>In February 2016, Cabinet granted approval to the project team to scope and define a proposal to develop a Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) utilising funding provided by the Department for Education (DfE). The move towards the creation of Regional Adoption Agencies is led by a national agenda to better target the recruitment of prospective adopters and speed up the matching and placement of children for adoption. The attached Business Case sets out the proposed approach for the creation of a new RAA including anticipated implementation costs which will be funded by the Department for Education.</p> <p>The proposed RAA brings together two unitary authorities and one county authority working in partnership with the Voluntary Adoption Agency (VAA), Families for Children to achieve better outcomes for all children and adults affected by adoption and special guardianship.</p> <p>Approximately 60 Local Authority (LA) staff will come together in the new organisation to deliver five main services across Dorset:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Recruitment and Assessment - to provide the prospective adopters;• Permanence Planning - ensuring that children identified as requiring adoption achieve a placement;• Matching and Placement - to match prospective adopters with children in need of adoption;

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adoption and Special Guardianship Support - to help all affected by adoption and special guardianship; • Special Guardianship Order Assessment - assessing prospective special guardians.
<p>Impact Assessment:</p> <p><i>Please refer to the protocol for writing reports.</i></p>	<p>Equalities Impact Assessment:</p> <p>Please see Appendix 2.</p> <hr/> <p>Use of Evidence:</p> <p>Please see Appendix 1.</p> <hr/> <p>Budget:</p> <p>Please refer to financial assessment in Appendix 1.</p> <hr/> <p>Risk Assessment:</p> <p>Having considered the risks associated with this decision using the County Council's approved risk management methodology, the level of risk has been identified as:</p> <p>Current Risk: LOW (Delete as appropriate) Residual Risk LOW (Delete as appropriate)</p> <hr/> <p>Other Implications:</p> <p>Voluntary Organisations; Corporate Parenting; or Safeguarding Children and Adults</p>
<p>Recommendation</p>	<p>Cabinet is recommended to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Approve the establishment of a Regional Adoption Agency. The proposed Regional Adoption Agency would combine the adoption services of Bournemouth Borough Council, Dorset County Council and the Borough of Poole, working in partnership with Families for Children, a voluntary adoption agency 2. Approve the Business Case for the Pan Dorset model of a Local Authority Single Hosted (LASH) model for delivery of adoption services 3. Approve that Bournemouth will host the adoption agency on the behalf of the three local authorities 4. Approve the proposed name for the new RAA: <i>Aspire Adoption</i> 5. Delegate authority to the Portfolio Holder for safeguarding, learning and skills in consultation with the Director Children's Services to make minor amendments to the business case following further discussions with Bournemouth Borough Council and the Borough of Poole 6. Delegate authority to the Portfolio Holder for safeguarding, learning and skills in consultation with the Director for Children's Services to agree appropriate governance arrangements for Aspire Adoption.

Consideration of the Proposals to implement a Regional Adoption Agency (RAA)

	<p>7. Delegate to Bournemouth Borough Council under section 101 of the Local Government Act 1972, the County Council's Adoption and Children Act 2002 function relating to adoption services , to discharge on behalf of the County Council and as host of the Regional Adoption Agency.</p>
<p>Reason for Recommendation</p>	<p>Councils have a statutory duty to provide adoption services to all those affected by adoption living in their area. Services to meet those responsibilities are required to meet legislative requirements and Minimum Standards for Adoption Services and are inspected regularly by Ofsted to ensure they do so.</p> <p>The move towards a proposed Regional Adoption Agency will not discharge the Council of its statutory responsibilities but will effect far reaching changes in how those functions are organised and managed. While Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole all continue to provide high performing adoption services, central government expects that Regional Adoption Agencies will be better able to target the recruitment of prospective adopters, speed up the matching and placement of children, improve adoption support services and may create efficiency savings.</p> <p>The Education and Adoption Act which came into force in April 2016 provides the Secretary of State with the power to order local authority adoption agencies to combine services if they do not voluntarily do so.</p>
<p>Appendices</p>	<p>Appendix 1 – Regional Adoption Agency (Aspire Adoption) Full Business Case and appendices</p> <p>Appendix 2 – EqIA</p>
<p>Background Papers</p>	<p>1. Regionalising Adoption – Department for Education, June 2015 https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/regional-adoption-agencies-programme</p> <p>2. Adoption: A Vision for Change- Department for Education, March 2016 https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/adoption-a-vision-for-change</p>
<p>Officer Contact</p>	<p>Name: Vanessa Glenn Tel: 01305 225089 Email: V.Glenn@dorsetcc.gov.uk</p>

1. Background detail

- 1.1. While Dorset continues to be a high performing service, central government expects that Regional Adoption Agencies will be better able to target the recruitment of prospective adopters, speed up the matching and placement of children, improve adoption support services and may create efficiency savings. The Education and Adoption Act came into force in April and provides the Secretary of State with the power to order local authority adoption agencies to combine services if they do not voluntarily do so. Funding is available from the Department for Education for those who embrace the changes voluntarily.
- 1.2. Placing children who cannot be brought up within their birth families more quickly in loving and permanent adoptive homes gives them the best chance of developing into happy, healthy, emotionally stable and independent young people. Delays in doing so can cause lasting harm. Adoption gives children the stability and love they deserve and a chance to recover from the trauma they may have suffered in early life. By combining services and expertise and operating on a larger scale, the development of a Regional Adoption Agency will provide opportunities to improve outcomes for some of our most vulnerable children.
- 1.3. In early October 2015, Bournemouth Borough Council, the Borough of Poole, Dorset County Council and Families for Children, a local voluntary adoption agency (VAA), were notified that they had been successful in their bid for funding to 'scope and define' proposals for a combined Regional Adoption Agency (RAA). Somerset County Council had originally been included within this bid, but subsequently decided to align themselves with the 'Adopt Southwest' group. Further detail on the local Regional Adoption Agency Project can be found in Background Papers 1 and 2.
- 1.4. From a local perspective, all four agencies have a long history of working together. The project builds on this partnership working, in particular with the voluntary adoption agency, Families for Children (FFC) through their active involvement, including FFC taking the project lead. The RAA will therefore bring together best practice from the Local Authorities and the VAA while providing the opportunity to create clear practice improvements.
- 1.5. A high level plan and cost estimates were submitted to the DfE for consideration in May 2016, with an announcement in early July 2016 that the Bournemouth, Dorset, Poole and Families for Children RAA project is one of only five RAA projects nationally to be given Demonstration Project status, as one of the projects showing the most potential. Funding of £150,000 was agreed by the DfE for the period from June to the end of October 2016 in order to produce the full Business Case. Projects other than the Demonstration Projects are receiving a much lower level of funding and have been asked to slow the pace of their work. This puts this project at the forefront nationally of the development work around Regional Adoption Agencies and the funding to enable us to progress the work at pace. In December 2016, the project was successful in obtaining commitment to a further £309,000 to implement the RAA.
- 1.6. The proposed name for the new RAA is "Aspire Adoption" reflecting the aspiration to learn, to build on and achieve practice improvements in the delivery of services for children, adopters and others who benefit from adoption services. Subject to Cabinet approval in February 2017, it is anticipated that Aspire Adoption will "go live" in July 2017.

2. Consultation

- 2.1. Consultation with stakeholders, including staff within Bournemouth, Poole and Dorset Children's Services, Families for Children and across other agencies such as Child and Mental Health Services and the court service, as well as with service users, is an integral part of the Regional Adoption Agency project. Consultation events have been held with over 200 stakeholders

including adults, children and young people affected by adoption; staff; and partners in health, education and the legal community.

- 2.2. Elected members have been kept informed and were consulted in respect of the progress of the local Regional Adoption Agency project in January 2016 and in July 2016.
- 2.3. More recently, service users have been consulted through a service user consultative group. The Chair, an adoptive parent, and another member of the group have joined the Project Board in their monthly meetings, to help design and deliver the new service.
- 2.4. Analysis of the responses from service users and staff from January through to April 2016 was undertaken by a Business Change partner. The key themes which emerged were categorised into four. These were a desire for a continuity of current standards; an expectation about the level and accessibility of post placement and post adoption support; suggestions about the higher level, strategic arrangements to be included in the structure and planning of the RAA; and issues to be considered given the increase in the geographical area that the agency would cover.
- 2.5. Engagement with colleagues in Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), NHS, and education via the Virtual School Heads has taken place at both a strategic and operational level on how the partner agencies would work with Aspire Adoption as a single agency in the future.
- 2.6. Ongoing stakeholder engagement and feedback are included in plans for the implementation phase of the project. A Stakeholder Communications plan is in place to ensure effective engagement with various stakeholder groups including Executive level LA officers, Elected members, VAA Trustees, Adoption Teams, wider Children's Social Care Staff, service users and partners.
- 2.7. Delivery Model Options considered
- 2.8. The move towards the creation of Regional Adoption Agencies is led by a national agenda to better target the recruitment of prospective adopters and speed up the matching and placement of children for adoption. Funding has been made available from the Department for Education to develop regional projects, backed by legislation in the form of the Education and Adoption Act 2016, which will require local authorities to combine their adoption services in Regional Adoption Agencies or be directed to do so if they do not choose to do so on a voluntary basis.
- 2.9. Each of the four agencies above have considered which of the following strategic delivery options for the RAA might be appropriate for this purpose. The options that have been considered are:
 - Option 1 - A single LA hosting on behalf of the other LAs - who in turn may commission additional services from voluntary adoption agencies, e.g. Families for Children
 - Option 2 - A Joint Venture between the LAs – a Local Authority Trading Company (LATC) – with scope to include VAAs on the Board arrangements subject to any procurement implications
 - Option 3 - A Joint Venture between the LAs and VAAs – creating a new VAA
 - Option 4 – Outsourcing service delivery to an existing VAA
- 2.10. Section 2.4 in the attached business case outlines the approach taken to evaluate and agree the proposed delivery model. The Options Appraisal methodology utilised the recommended approach by the DfE and has been used by projects throughout the Regionalising Adoption Programme. The original results of the Options Appraisal exercise had indicated that the Option 2, an LATC model, could provide greater flexibility and ability to innovate and grow outside of the

constraints of the culture and regulation of local government. However, as the financial modelling progressed it became clear that there is not sufficient Local Authority budget funding at the current time to meet the operational costs of an LATC as the delivery model for Aspire Adoption. There is however adequate funding available to move forward with an RAA which is hosted by one of the three Local Authorities, and on this basis, the recommended delivery model is Option 1, a single LA hosting on behalf of the three authorities.

3. Summary of finance and resourcing implications

- 3.1. The provision of an adoption service is a statutory requirement. The funding for the provision of the service within Dorset comes from the overall budget provided for Children's Services. The budget allocated for 2016-2017 to the Adoption services in scope for the Dorset element of the RAA was £918,300 including staffing and the provision of services, taking into account interagency adoption placements but excluding adoption and special guardianship allowances and other financial support to adoptive families.
- 3.2. Funding for the local RAA project in the 'Scope and Define' phase is being provided by the Department for Education. Funding of £264,810 has been provided to date by the DfE for the period between October 2015 and the end of October 2016. The project has been given Demonstration Project status by the DfE, as one of those showing the most potential. Other projects are receiving a much lower level of funding and have been asked to slow the pace of their work. Being a "demonstrator project" allows us to influence ways of working rather than having them imposed upon us.
- 3.3. There is approximately £60,000 remaining from DfE funding received to date to carry over into the project implementation budget. In December 2016, the project was successful in obtaining commitment to a further £309,000 to implement the RAA.
- 3.4. Section 4 in the attached business case sets out the financial analysis and modelling of the expected overall operational costs of the RAA. This indicates that total operating costs for the new RAA equate to approximately £2m per year, including staff and other costs which are largely part of Local Authority adoption team budgets but not including the payment of adoption or special guardianship allowances, the funding of which will remain within the local authorities. These are ongoing payments, which are determined with reference to legislation, and means tested against set criteria. Local authorities are able to make these payments to adoptive families or special guardians where a child has ongoing additional needs as a result of what has happened to them prior to being placed for adoption.
- 3.5. A number of funding models have been considered to determine the amount each Local Authority will contribute towards the RAA budget and the funding formula that has been agreed will be sufficient to meet the £2m operating costs for 2017-2018.

4. Summary of legal implications

- 4.1. The provision of an adoption service is a statutory requirement and the Council is required to monitor the provision of adoption services. Pursuant to section 3 of the Adoption and Children Act 2002, each Council must continue to maintain within its area an adoption service designed to meet the needs of children who may be adopted, their parents, natural parents and former guardians.
- 4.2. The development of a Regional Adoption Agency will not absolve each local authority of its statutory responsibilities, but will allow for certain functions to be delegated to facilitate the operation of a regional adoption agency model.

- 4.3. Local authorities may delegate certain functions to another authority, to a specific officer or to a Joint Committee in accordance with the Local Government Act 1972 (the "LGA 1972"). An inter authority agreement (the "IAA") will exist between the authorities which will identify the Lead Authority to host the Regional Adoption Agency.
- 4.4. Whether a local authority decides to delegate its functions to another local authority, any of the participating authorities may decide to withdraw the delegated powers.
- 4.5. The recommendation is that the relevant functions are delegated to Bournemouth Borough Council, as host authority. More detailed information about the proposed governance arrangements and legal implications is contained in section 3.7 of the attached business case.
- 4.6. Further legal advice will be required (as set out in the business case) and any financial, governance and other arrangements when agreed will need to be documented by way of an IAA in a form to be approved by Legal Services.

5. Summary of human resources implications

- 5.1. Human Resources representatives from the three local authorities are already involved in a work stream informing the design and delivery of the new service. Independent legal advice has been obtained about the staffing implications, including the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) regulations (TUPE), and pensions, of the different potential delivery models.
- 5.2. Further work will be undertaken by the HR work stream to consider the advantages and disadvantages of transferring staff under the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) regulations (TUPE) or by using secondment arrangements. HR and Payroll administration activities will need to be completed to set up staff on the host's HR and Payroll system.
- 5.3. Location is a key concern for staff. Kinson Hub has been identified as the preferred option for the headquarters of Aspire Adoption. The relocation of at least some staff from their current working base will be required to meet the needs of the organisation as a regional agency. However, the service covers the county of Dorset and a high degree of flexible working is anticipated. To this end access to hot desking hubs as 'touch down' points in existing LA premises across the county for staff and service users is being pursued.
- 5.4. Job descriptions and person specifications for new roles and subsequent job evaluation will need to be undertaken, along with recruitment and selection activities for new roles and matching existing staff to teams in the new organisation.
- 5.5. Training and support for new ways of working in a single agency will be set up and plans will be established for the ongoing professional development of staff.
- 5.6. A formal consultation process with recognised Trade Unions will need to be undertaken by all the partner employers for all staff affected by the transfer; this will form part of the HR Work Stream project plan.

6. Summary of environmental impact

- 6.1. A Sustainability Impact Assessment was completed and there are no issues arising.
- 6.2. Summary of equalities and diversity impact
- 6.3. An Equality Impact Needs Assessment has been completed and is included with background papers. Adoption services are statutory services and the development of the RAA will not change this. The three local authorities will still need to be provided with those services albeit via a

different delivery model. The three local authorities will continue to have oversight and scrutiny of how they are delivered.

7. Summary of risk assessment

- 7.1. The Bournemouth Borough Council adoption service has consistently produced excellent outcomes for children needing adoptive homes and a comprehensive service to adults affected by adoption i.e. adopters, adopted adults and birth parents. The service was described as outstanding in the Ofsted inspection of the Bournemouth adoption service in 2012, with no requirements for improvement. The most recent Ofsted inspection of services in Bournemouth for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers in April and May 2014 included a sub judgement in respect of adoption services. The adoption service was seen as a strength and the sub judgement was 'good.'
- 7.2. An Ofsted inspection of Dorset County Council's services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers took place in February and March 2016, also included a sub judgement in respect of their adoption services graded as good within the context of an improved service overall.
- 7.3. The Borough of Poole has yet to be inspected under the same Ofsted Single Inspection Framework in relation to their children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers, and including their adoption services.
- 7.4. Merging with the adoption services in Bournemouth and Poole could pose challenges to maintaining the high quality services which are currently being provided to those affected by adoption living in the County. However, there is a risk to the Local Authority if it fails to join a regional agency, this would include the government directing how its services would be delivered. Participation in the Department for Education's Regional Adoption Agency Programme as a "demonstrator project" allows us to influence ways of working rather than having them imposed upon us. The RAA will therefore bring together best practice from these LAs and the VAA while providing the opportunity to create clear practice improvements and enable a viable future market for recruitment. Indeed, success in delivery of adoption services through the RAA will also lead to the opportunity to grow and develop the business.
- 7.5. Major change will see a potentially worrying time for staff. The engagement of staff directly involved in the delivery of adoption services, and the involvement of current service users will be essential mitigation alongside keeping colleagues in partner organisations informed.
- 7.6. Any future difference in opinion across the LAs as to the role and scope of the RAA and future governance could delay implementation.

Sara Tough
Director for Children's Services
January 2017

Appendix 1 – Business Case



Project Title: Regional Adoption Agency (Aspire Adoption)

Full Business Case (FBC)

Authorisation (sign off):

Approval from	Comment	Date
Project Board		
Management Board		
Section 151 Officers		
Local Authority Portfolio Holders		

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1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

It is proposed that a new Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) is created through combining the adoption services for the local authority areas of Bournemouth Borough Council, Dorset County Council and The Borough of Poole, working in partnership with the Voluntary Adoption Agency, Families for Children (FFC). These agencies wish to build on the success of their existing services to improve performance in meeting the needs of those children who require permanence through adoption and special guardianship by bringing together the best practice from each authority and the voluntary agency through the RAA.

This document describes how establishing a single agency will allow the three authorities to provide a more cohesive, efficient and effective use of resources and development of practice to the benefit of children, adopters and others who gain from adoption or special guardianship services. It proposes that Bournemouth Borough Council will host the RAA, the cost of implementation to be funded by the Department for Education. This document also sets out how the RAA will work with its partners to deliver Adoption Services in partnership with FFC.

In June 2015, the Department for Education (DfE) published a paper, 'Regionalising Adoption,' setting out the proposals for the establishment of Regional Adoption Agencies (RAAs). The paper gave a very clear directive to local authorities that it was the expectation for all authorities to be part of a Regional Adoption Agency by 2020. Further policy statements since then continue to support the proposed reforms to adoption and outline the provision of funding and support for the creation of RAAs. Locally it has been proposed that we will incorporate special guardianship assessment and support services into the work of the RAA.

The move towards the creation of Regional Adoption Agencies is led by a national agenda to better target the recruitment of prospective adopters and speed up the matching and placement of children for adoption. Funding is being made available from the Department for Education (DfE) as part of a national Regional Adoption Agency Programme, backed by legislation in the form of the Education and Adoption Act 2016, which requires local authorities to combine their adoption services in Regional Adoption Agencies, or be directed to do so if they do not choose to do so on a voluntary basis. There is a risk to authorities that fail to join a regional agency, this would include the government directing how its services would be delivered.

The implementation of the new RAA would follow substantial project work undertaken since October 2015. Funding of £264,810 has been provided by the DfE to develop our proposals, in particular to enable us to "scope and define" the operational model and organisational structure of the new RAA. Our project has been given Demonstration Project status by the DfE, as one of those showing the most potential. Being a "demonstrator project" allows us to influence ways of working rather than having them imposed upon us. There is approximately £60,000 remaining from DfE funding received to date to carry over into the project implementation budget. In December 2016, the project was successful in obtaining commitment to a further £309,000 to implement the RAA.

Through working in partnership with the Voluntary Adoption Agency, Families for Children, the vision of the proposed RAA is to achieve excellent outcomes for children and adults affected by adoption and special guardianship through:

- Working closely across the Local Authorities and partners to ensure that children's best interests are at the heart of placement decisions which will fully meet their needs;
- Targeting recruitment and establishing a wide and diverse pool of prospective adopters, especially those suitable to adopt priority children;

- Matching so that children are placed without delay in secure, loving families;
- Providing creative and outstanding adoption and special guardianship support services;
- Investing in the workforce to ensure they have the right skills and capacity to deliver excellent services;
- Continually seeking to apply best practice and innovation to our ways of working;
- Actively listening to and learning from children, adults and staff to develop and improve the services provided.

The proposed name for the new RAA is “*Aspire Adoption*” reflecting the aspiration to learn, to build on existing good practice and achieve practice improvements in the delivery of services for children, adopters and others who benefit from or are in need of adoption and special guardianship services. It is anticipated that the Aspire Adoption will “go live” in July 2017.

This venture will have a very high profile both within the region and nationally. Aspire Adoption will be one of the very first regional adoption agencies in the UK. All three local authorities and Families for Children will be seen as pioneering and innovative for joining in this project. This will enhance the reputation of each of the authorities and raise the profile of the Dorset partnership in central government and nationally.

Assumptions made:

- All agencies have the resources available to actively lead on and participate in agreed work streams and achieve the deliverables within agreed timescales set out in the plan;
- Required project funding outlined in the finance plan submitted to the DfE is made available;
- Aspire Adoption will take case work responsibility for the child at the earliest possible point, at the discretion of each Agency Decision Maker but in most cases at the point of the Placement Order being granted;
- Staff affected will retain their existing Terms and Conditions (Ts & Cs), including pension rights, holiday entitlements and sick pay policies. Further work will be undertaken to determine whether staff will be transferred to the host authority under the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) regulations (TUPE) or by using secondment arrangements.
- Any applicable redundancy costs will be underwritten by the currently employing LAs as this will not be funded by the DfE or the host LA;
- Premises – Aspire Adoption will be “headquartered” in a single location, the preferred option for which is Kinson Hub, with access to mobile working and to existing office bases across the region for staff and service users, and to make the most efficient use of staff time.

Summary project costs and funding to implement the RAA are:

Proposed Funding Source	Amount (£k)	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
Department for Education RAA Programme Funding	368.3	134.2	234.1	0.0
Dorset County Council	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Bournemouth Borough Council	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0

The Borough of Poole	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Funding TOTAL	368.3	134.2	234.1	0.0
Project Costs TOTAL	368.3	134.2	234.1	0.0

Local Authority funding contributions to ongoing operational costs are set out in Section 4.2 below.

2 INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

2.1 PURPOSE OF THIS DOCUMENT

This document sets out the case for creating a new Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) to be named “*Aspire Adoption*” through combining the adoption services for the local authority areas of Bournemouth Borough Council, Dorset County Council and The Borough of Poole, working in partnership with the Voluntary Adoption Agency, Families for Children (FFC). It describes how establishing a single agency will allow the three authorities to provide a more cohesive, efficient and effective use of resources and promote the development of practice to the benefit of children, adopters and others who gain from adoption services. It proposes that Bournemouth Borough Council will host the new adoption agency, the cost of implementation to be funded by the Department for Education. This document also sets out how *Aspire Adoption* will work with its partners to deliver Adoption Services in partnership with FFC.

2.2 PROJECT WORK UNDERTAKEN SO FAR

The implementation of the new RAA follows substantial project work undertaken since October 2015. Funding of £264,810 has been provided to date by the DfE to develop our proposals, in particular to “scope and define” the operational model and organisational structure of *Aspire Adoption*. Substantial progress has been made by the project since mobilising the project team at the end of last year, including:

- Establishing pan-agency project organisation and project governance arrangements including establishment of a Project Board and Management Board;
- Consultation events have been held with over 200 participants. Stakeholder groups have included adults, children and young people affected by adoption; staff; and partners in health, education and the legal community;
- Elected members and portfolio holders have been consulted in all three local authorities as well as the Board of Trustees in Families for Children.
- Continued stakeholder engagement through web based surveys, staff newsletters and face to face events;
- Options appraisal and evaluation of delivery model options, including obtaining independent external legal advice on the options available;
- Process maps have been developed and baseline statistical data has been obtained to inform the development of a target operating model;
- A service user consultative group has been set up, with an adopter as chair and two members of that group joining the Project Board in their monthly meetings, to help design and deliver the new service.

Joint working with the Voluntary Adoption Agency, Families for Children, is at the heart of our project. They are the lead agency in all aspects of the project, are integral partners in developing our proposals and are part of all the discussions and deliberations about our RAA, liaising with our coach and the DfE, and chairing Project Board meetings.

2.3 SCOPE AND VISION OF THE NEW RAA

The proposed Regional Adoption Agency would encompass the local authority areas of Bournemouth Borough Council, Dorset County Council and The Borough of Poole. It is estimated that approximately 70 – 100 children annually will be placed by the RAA.

Aspire Adoption brings together two unitary authorities and one county authority working in partnership with Families for Children. The vision is to achieve excellent outcomes for children and adults affected by adoption and special guardianship through:

- Working closely with the Local Authorities and partners to ensure that children’s best interests are at the heart of placement decisions which will fully meet their needs;
- Targeting recruitment and establishing a wide and diverse pool of prospective adopters;
- Matching so that children are placed without delay in secure, loving families;
- Providing creative and outstanding adoption and special guardianship support services;
- Investing in the workforce to ensure they have the right skills and capacity to deliver excellent services;
- Continually seeking to apply best practice and innovation to our ways of working;
- Actively listening to and learning from children, adults and staff to develop and improve the services provided.

2.4 DELIVERY MODEL OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND RECOMMENDATION

The three Local Authorities (LAs) involved will commission the delivery of adoption and adoption related services from the RAA. To this end, together with the Voluntary Adoption Agency (VAA), they have considered which of the following strategic delivery options for the RAA might be appropriate for this purpose. The options that have been considered are:

- Option 1 - A single LA hosting on behalf of the other LAs
- Option 2 - A Joint Venture between the LAs – a Local Authority Trading Company (LATC)
- Option 3 - A Joint Venture between the LAs and VAAs – creating a new VAA
- Option 4 - Outsourcing service delivery to an existing VAA

The Options Appraisal methodology utilised the recommended approach by the DfE and has been used by projects throughout the Regionalising Adoption Programme. Project Board members from each agency individually evaluated the 4 options against a set of criteria considering 1) Desirability, i.e. How well the delivery model would promote the objectives and priorities of adopters and adoptees and help meet key outcomes (feel safe, live fulfilling lives, be healthy, have a voice, reach their potential and be resilient); 2) Feasibility, that is the extent to which each option could be implemented within required timelines and budgets and allows for an appropriate level of ownership, involvement and control of the partners and 3) Viability, the extent to which the model demonstrates financial and operational sustainability.

The initial Options Appraisal indicated that Options 1, 2 and 3 could be considered as possible options. Option 4 was appraised as unlikely to be as cost effective as other options, being less flexible and less favourable in terms of achieving the desired outcomes. Independent legal advice was obtained on Options 1-3 and presented to Management Board members and local authority legal officers on these options. This advice offered an opportunity for them, as decision makers, to gain a better understanding of the opportunities and considerations for each delivery model and make a more informed choice.

As the proposed operational design developed, this highlighted that Option 3, a new VAA, is likely to be more complex and costly to establish and operate. Furthermore, Families for Children are not in a position to transfer staff and operations into the new RAA, so effectively could not fully participate in Option 3.

Financial modelling was therefore carried out on Option 1 (LA hosted model) and Option 2 (an LATC). The original results of the Options Appraisal exercise had indicated that the Option 2 LATC model could provide greater flexibility and ability to innovate and grow outside of the constraints of the culture and regulation of local government. However, as the financial modelling progressed it became clear that there is not sufficient Local Authority budget funding at the current time to meet the operational costs of an LATC as the delivery model for Aspire Adoption. There is however adequate funding available to move forward with an RAA which is hosted by one of the three Local Authorities, and on this basis, **the recommended delivery model set out in this business case is Option 1 a Local Authority hosted model** to be hosted by Bournemouth Borough Council.

While it is not deemed to be fiscally viable to proceed with an LATC at the moment, this is an option for the future and the RAA will retain an aspiration for moving to the LATC model when it may be financially appropriate to do so. Currently the budget is approximately £300k short of the funding needed to implement an LATC model. The financial analysis set out in Section 4.2 below, reflects that Aspire Adoption would retain any trading surplus from inter-agency placements to build a fund that could be used to finance the potential future transition from LA hosted to LATC delivery models.

Proposed governance arrangements for the hosted model are set out in Section 3.7. While a hosted model, they reflect the strong support of FFC's involvement in governance, design and delivery of services to Aspire Adoption.

The operating model is described more fully in section 3 below which also sets out how the new agency will deliver improvements. Design principles applied in shaping the new organisation include:

- Service user focused – feedback sought and taken into account when developing how the Agency will work and how it develops in the future
- Best practice and culture of creativity – encouraging improvement and development of new and innovative ways of working
- Cost neutral or better – the new model should cost no more than the current model and efficiencies will be sought following initial implementation
- Professional development – enabling staff to further develop their skills and knowledge to achieve the vision and aims of the RAA
- Corporate style governance and control - accountabilities are clear and delivery performance can be actively managed through contracts, Service Level Agreements, etc. and clear metrics
- Flexible and scalable services - to support changes in demand and priorities and deployment of its capability and capacity.

2.5 OVERVIEW OF THE OPERATING MODEL

From a local perspective, the four agencies have a long history of working together. Indeed prior to the Local Government Reorganisation in 1997, Children's Services in Bournemouth and Poole were delivered through Dorset County. Historically, Families for Children have worked closely with all three local authorities in providing services such as a commissioned independent birth relative support service and in co working, for example with support groups, joint recruitment activity and joint training for prospective adopters. This has enabled constructive working together in developing the target operating model.

Aspire Adoption will therefore bring together best practice from these LAs and the VAA while providing the opportunity to create clear practice improvements and enable a viable future market for recruitment. Approximately 60 LA staff, many of whom work part time, are expected to become part of the new organisation to deliver the following main services across Dorset:

- Recruitment and Assessment – to provide the prospective adopters;
- Permanence Planning – ensuring that children identified as requiring adoption achieve a placement;
- Matching and Placement – to match prospective adopters with children in need of adoption;
- Adoption and Special Guardianship Support – to help all affected by adoption and special guardianship; □
Special Guardianship Order Assessment – assessing prospective special guardians.

More detail on the Operating Model is found in Section 3 below.

2.6 STRATEGIC BENEFITS

The key aim in combining services to create a single Regional Adoption Agency is to achieve better outcomes for all children and young people with adoption plans in the region. Local Authorities and Voluntary Adoption Agencies will come together and combine adoption services into a new regional agency to benefit children and their adoptive families, with larger operating areas giving a wider pool of adopters and children, more effective matching and better support services.

The Government set out the challenges they are seeking to address nationally through the creation of Regional Adoption Agencies in the paper 'Regionalising Adoption', published in June 2015. In summary, these are: -

Inefficiencies

A highly-fragmented system with around 180 agencies recruiting and matching adopters for only 5,000 children per year (this number has subsequently decreased). The majority of agencies are operating on a small scale with over half recruiting fewer than 20 adopters in the first three quarters of 2014/15. This is not an effective and efficient scale to be operating at and is likely to mean that costs are higher because management overheads and fixed costs are shared over a smaller base. Having a system that is fragmented in this way reduces the scope for broader, strategic planning, as well as specialisation, innovation and investment. Large numbers of small agencies render the system unable to make the best use of the national supply of potential adopters, more vulnerable to peaks and troughs in the flow of children, and less cost effective.

Matching

The system needs to match children with families far more quickly. Nationally, the data also shows that, as at 30 September 2015, there were 3,060 children with a placement order waiting to be matched. 38% of these children had been waiting longer than 18 months. The costs of delay, both to children and to the system, are high. It is vital that children are given the best and earliest possible chance of finding a family, irrespective of authority boundaries and lack of trust of other agencies' adopters. It is unacceptable that children are left

waiting in the system when families can be found. Successful matching relies on being able to access a wide range of potential adopters from the beginning and operating at a greater scale would allow social workers to do this, thus reducing delay in the system. It could also reduce the number of children who have their adoption decisions reversed. In 2015-16, this happened to 900 children nationally. Furthermore, the opportunity for practice innovation created by moving to a new delivery model also has real potential to improve matching.

Recruitment

Whilst there has been growth in adopter recruitment there are too few adopters willing and able to adopt 'priority' children. Recruitment from a wider geographical base as part of a regional recruitment strategy could be one way of addressing this. Incentives also need to be better aligned so that agencies are encouraged to recruit the right kind of adopters given the characteristics of the children waiting. Recruitment from a wider geographical base than an individual local authority, that takes account of the needs of children across a number of those local authorities in a regional recruitment strategy and uses specialist techniques for recruiting adopters for hard to place children, would potentially lead to fewer children waiting.

Adoption Support

Currently adoption support services are provided by a mix of local authority provision, the NHS and independent providers (voluntary adoption agencies, adoption support agencies and small independent providers). There is a risk that the public and independent sectors are unlikely to be able to grow sufficiently to meet increased demand for adoption support. There are regional gaps in the types of services on offer and little evidence of spare capacity. The sector is currently dominated by spot purchasing and sole providers. This is not an efficient way to deliver these services. For providers to expand and therefore operate at a more efficient scale, services need to be commissioned on bigger and longer term contracts. RAAs should enable this to be done.

The Local Perspective

The statutory functions required of local authorities in respect of adoption are provided by each of the three local authorities within their own geographic areas. Additionally, Families for Children recruit, assess, support and family find for prospective adopters and adopters from a base in Dorchester. There is already a great deal of joint working between the 4 adoption agencies to provide parts of the current service.

Over the past three years, the three local authorities placed a combined total of 190 of their own looked after children for adoption and approved a total of 178 sets of adoptive parents. They placed another 61 children who were in the care of other local authorities over the same three year period with prospective adoptive families they had assessed. In the same period, Families for Children placed 43 children from local authorities locally and nationally from the Dorchester office.

Joining the three local authority services together within Aspire Adoption, working in partnership with Families for Children, will enable efficiencies to be achieved and improvements to services for all those affected by adoption.

In terms of recruiting adoptive parents all the agencies are currently competing with each other. There is a duplication of effort and associated costs with the risk that people wanting to be considered as adoptive parents are confused about where and how to proceed with their enquiry. Aspire Adoption will have a single point of contact for prospective adopters, reducing the current fragmentation of services. Similarly, a single point of

entry to the adoption service locally will improve access to adoption support services for adoptive families, and also for adopted adults and birth family members, who have a statutory entitlement to receive a service.

Combining the services should ensure that management overheads and fixed costs will be reduced over time. The new service will allow for the more efficient use of staff time, for example prospective adoptive parents are provided with training as part of the assessment process. Currently Dorset run these training sessions in-house, whilst Bournemouth, Poole and Families for Children operate a combined service. Aspire Adoption will deliver training courses across the whole area resulting in less duplication and more timely access to the training courses for prospective adopters. There will also be the opportunity for trialling new approaches, including the use of experienced adoptive parents as trainers.

There are currently three Adoption Panels operating across the three Local Authorities. Aspire Adoption will have one Adoption Panel which will consider applications from prospective adopters and placements of children with approved adopters. Agency Decisions in relation to these functions will be made by the Agency Decision Maker for the RAA. It will no longer be necessary for the three Local Authorities to retain their individual Adoption Panels, but each will continue to have a designated Agency Decision Maker for considering and agreeing the plan that a child should be placed for adoption.

Aspire Adoption will have case holding responsibility for children delegated by the local authorities. Many of these cases will transfer at the point of the court granting a Placement Order, enabling the child to be placed for adoption. This will reduce some of the current overlap of work between the adoption and child care teams, enable a more focused effort to achieve a timely adoption placement for the child, and release capacity within the local authority child care teams.

Aspire Adoption will also take on the responsibility for Special Guardianship assessments across the three Local Authorities, enabling a higher quality, more coordinated and cohesive service to be provided.

The new combined service provides the opportunity for the provision of a service of excellence for adoption support and special guardianship support. This will be a multi-disciplinary service involving colleagues from health and education and providing comprehensive and high level targeted support for adopted children, adoptive parents, adopted adults, birth family members and those affected by Special Guardianship across the region.

Aspire Adoption will aim to reduce the proportion of children whose plans are changed from adoption because an adoption placement cannot be found (13 children in the last 2 years), and the number of adoption placement disruptions (6 children in the last 2 years). The RAA will bring the existing local expertise among managers and social workers together in respect of what makes a good match, and will be looking at a high proportion of children being transferred to the RAA at the point of Placement Order. Early identification of children with likely adoption plans by the Permanence Coordinators, and the plans for the RAA worker to undertake direct work with the child during the court proceedings will enable fuller and more accurate assessments of an individual child's needs to inform matching, and prepare the child. The transfer of case responsibility for most children at the point of the Placement Order will also raise standards in respect of developing more targeted adoption support plans with the co-location of the Family Finding and Matching Team and a dedicated multi-disciplinary Adoption Support Team within Aspire. Being more strategic in terms of recruitment will also widen choice of potential adoptive families for children, which again should lead to better and more sustainable matching.

Benefits will be delivered through adopting the "best practice" from the four contributing organisations. This will be of particular value in delivering benefits from the areas of Early Permanence (concurrency and fostering

to adopt), improved adoption support, making optimal use of colleagues in health and education as well as those in Aspire registered as social workers and those without social work qualifications but with other relevant knowledge, skills and experience.

This venture will have a very high profile both within the region and nationally. Aspire Adoption will be one of the very first regional adoption agencies in the UK. All three local authorities and Families for Children will be seen as pioneering and innovative for joining in this project. This will enhance the reputation of each of the authorities and raise the profile of the Dorset partnership in central Government and nationally.

2.7 STRATEGIC RISKS – BOTH OF DOING THE PROJECT AND NOT DOING IT

Major reorganisation of adoption services in the region may have an impact on service delivery to children and adoptive families in the short term. To mitigate this risks, performance measures aligned with the revised operating model and regular monitoring arrangements will be established between the host and non-host authorities.

Any future difference in opinion across the LAs as to the role and scope of Aspire Adoption and future governance arrangements could delay implementation.

There is a risk to the Local Authority if it fails to join a regional agency. This would include central government directing how its services would be delivered. Participation in the Department for Education's Regional Adoption Agency Programme as a demonstrator project allows us to influence ways of working rather than having them imposed upon us.

There is an opportunity to transform adoption delivery but there is a risk that utilising a LA hosted model rather than an LATC could constrain Aspire's ability to execute change on a timely basis.

The proposed organisational staffing levels proposed in this business case have been based on actual demand experienced over the past three years, however because of the current difficulties in predicting the levels of activity (e.g., numbers of children with adoption plans, number of Special Guardianship Order assessments) there is a risk that suggested staffing levels might not be consistent with demand. It is anticipated that Aspire Adoption will commission a VAA partner to meet unexpected demand.

There is risk, even regionally, of not being able to recruit adopters able to meet the needs of the children waiting, leading to more interagency placements and financial viability issues. More coordinated and targeted recruitment activity is expected to address this.

Major change will see a potentially worrying time for staff and proposed changes to ways of working could lead to a risk that Aspire may find it challenging to retain its existing experienced and qualified adoption team workforce. The engagement of staff directly involved in the delivery of adoption services, and the involvement of current service users will be essential mitigation alongside keeping colleagues in partner organisations informed. The project team have been engaging with staff to ensure they are engaged and enthused about the opportunities in a joint agency.

2.8 REALISING THE BENEFITS OF THE RAA

The diagram in Appendix A shows how key elements of the planned project work and implementation combine to achieve our desired outcomes and how these align to meet central Governments objectives set out in their paper 'Adoption: A Vision for Change.'

Benefits expected to be realized through the project include:

- Improved timescales for adopter assessments
- Higher conversion rate from enquiry to approval of prospective adopters
- Early identification of children with potential adoption plans and more children placed on an Early Permanence (Fostering to Adopt or concurrency) basis
- Reduction in the number of children for whom the permanence plan has changed away from adoption
- Increase in the percentage of children adopted for care
- More timely matching of approved adopters
- Improved timescales for placing children with their adoptive families
- Fewer prospective adopter approvals rescinded as approved adopters are not matched with a child
- Fewer adoption placement disruptions pre and post adoption order and in SGO placements
- More robust, timely SGO assessments, with clearer and SMART support plans, leading to fewer Special Guardianship breakdowns
- Improved performance measurement and management across the service

2.9 STAKEHOLDERS CONSULTED

Consultation with stakeholders is an integral part of the Regional Adoption Agency project. Engagement events have taken place with over 200 participants from stakeholder groups including service users - adults, children and young people affected by adoption; staff within Bournemouth, Poole and Dorset Children's Services, partners in health - NHS and CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services); education via Virtual Heads; and the court service. Consultation events have been held since January 2016 and continued stakeholder engagement has taken place through web based surveys, staff newsletters and face to face events.

Analysis of the responses from service users and staff from January through to April 2016 was undertaken. The key themes which emerged were categorised into four areas. These were a desire for a continuity of current standards; an expectation about the level and accessibility of support; suggestions about the higher level, strategic arrangements to be included in the structure and planning of the RAA; and issues to be considered given the increase in the physical area that the agency would cover.

Service user comments have been referred to as part of the design work and in particular the project has benefited from feedback and input through a service user consultative group. The Chair, an adoptive parent, and another member of the group attend the Project Board in their monthly meetings, to help design and deliver the new service.

Key topics raised by service users are that:

- The RAA should be involved with the child directly prior to matching. Direct contact with the child is likely to enable a smoother and more timely matching and transition process;
- Service users should be able to contact staff on the phone, within office hours;

- There should be good communication between departments, and a clear organisation structure, with location and contact details made available;
- There should be improvement on end to end process times, reducing the time that both children and adults are in the process and improving on the times individually set by Bournemouth, Poole, Dorset and Families for Children;
- There should be continued inclusion of clinical psychology support in adoption services with thoughts for how this could best work in the proposed RAA;
- Service user’s travel should be kept to a minimum, especially as the geographical area of the organisation is seen to be growing;
- Technology currently in place should be built on, improving the web site and taking advantage of other technology, in particular better and more effective use of social media;
- Adoption services need to be accessible post adoption, throughout family life, for children, adoptive parents, adopted adults and birth parents;
- There should be learning from other projects. The change was seen as a way of incorporating good ideas from elsewhere and adopting best practice.

Engagement with colleagues in CAMHS, NHS and education has taken place at both a strategic and operational level on how the partner agencies would work with Aspire Adoption as a single agency in the future. Ongoing stakeholder engagement and feedback are included in plans for the implementation phase of the project. A Stakeholder Communications plan is in place to ensure continued effective engagement with various stakeholder groups including Executive level LA officers, Adoption Teams, wider Children's Social Care staff, service users and partners.

Elected members and portfolio holders have been consulted in all three local authorities, as well as the Board of Trustees in Families for Children. Papers on the RAA project have been presented to the Bournemouth Overview and Scrutiny Panel on 20th January 2016 and again on 21st July 2016; to the Board of Trustees in Families for Children on 26th September 2016; to Dorset County Council’s Cabinet on 24th February 2016; to the Borough of Poole’s Cabinet in October 2015, and Corporate Parenting Working Party on 19th July 2016.

3 RAA OPERATING MODEL

3.1 PROCESS

The target operating model for the new RAA considers its role in the delivery of the following main services across Dorset:

- Recruitment and Assessment – to provide the prospective adopters;
- Permanence Planning – Identifying children who need adopting;
- Matching and Placement – to match prospective adopters with children in need of adoption;
- Adoption and Special Guardianship Support – to help all affected by adoption and special guardianship;
- Special Guardianship Order Assessment – assessing prospective special guardians.

3.1.1 Roles and Responsibilities

The table below sets out the RAA and LAs will work together, summarising roles and responsibilities for each:

Function	Regional Adoption Agency	Local Authority
RECRUITMENT AND ASSESSMENT		
Marketing and Recruitment Strategy	✓	
Adopter Recruitment and Enquiries	✓	
Assessment of Prospective Adopters – all Stage One and Stage Two functions	✓	
Completion of Prospective Adopter Report	✓	
Agency Decision Maker for approval of adopters	✓	
Post approval training	✓	
Matching	✓	
Post Placement training for Prospective Adopters	✓	
PERMANENCE PLANNING		
Early identification of a child possibly requiring adoption		✓
Tracking and monitoring the child possibly requiring adoption	✓	✓
Support and advice to child care social worker on the adoption process	✓	✓
Sibling or other specialist assessments if commissioned by LA	✓	
Direct work to prepare child prior to placement	✓	
Preparation of the Child Permanence Report		✓
Agency Decision Maker for “Should be placed for Adoption” decisions		✓
Case management prior to the point agreed by the LA ADM		✓
Case management from point agreed by the LA ADM	✓	
MATCHING AND PLACEMENT		
Family finding	✓	
Looked After Child reviews	✓	✓
Shortlist and visit potential families	✓	
Organising child appreciation day	✓	
Ongoing direct work to prepare child prior to placement	✓	
Adoption Panel administration and management	✓	
Agency adviser role	✓	
Agency Decision Maker for Matching prospective adopters and child	✓	
Placement Planning meeting administration and management of introductions	✓	
Support to family post placement and planning and delivery of adoption support	✓	

Ongoing life story work and preparation of Life story book	✓	
Independent Review Officer monitoring of quality of child's care and care plan		✓
Support prospective adopters in preparation and submission of application for Adoption Order – including attending at court	✓	
Preparation of later life letter	✓	
ADOPTION AND SPECIAL GUARDIANSHIP SUPPORT		
Assessment for adoption or special guardianship support	✓	
Developing and delivering adoption and special guardianship support plans	✓	
Agree and administer financial support to adoptive families pre and post Adoption Order		✓
Adoption and special guardianship support delivery including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support groups • Social events • Post adoption/special guardianship training • Independent Birth Relative services • Support with ongoing birth relative contact • Specialist Life Story practitioners • Adoption counselling and training 	✓	
Financial support to adopters and special guardians including adoption and special guardianship allowances		✓
SPECIAL GUARDIANSHIP ORDERS		
Receipt of application or court request for special guardianship		✓
Assessment of applicants for Special Guardianship	✓	
NON-AGENCY ADOPTIONS		
Step parent/partner adoption assessments	✓	
Intercountry adoption assessments and post approval and post order support	✓	

As part of implementation the project team will explore potential areas for the VAA to partner with Aspire to support service delivery including consideration of the following areas:

- ✓ Targeted recruitment activity focusing on Early Permanence and targeted assessments for priority children
- ✓ Partner/non-agency adoption assessments
- ✓ Administration and management of the RAA Adoption Panel
- ✓ Training for adopters both pre and post approval and placement
- ✓ Specialist adoption support training

- ✓ Specialist practical or therapeutic support services for children and families post placement and post order
- ✓ Adoption counselling and services to adopted adults
- ✓ Continued provision of VAA families

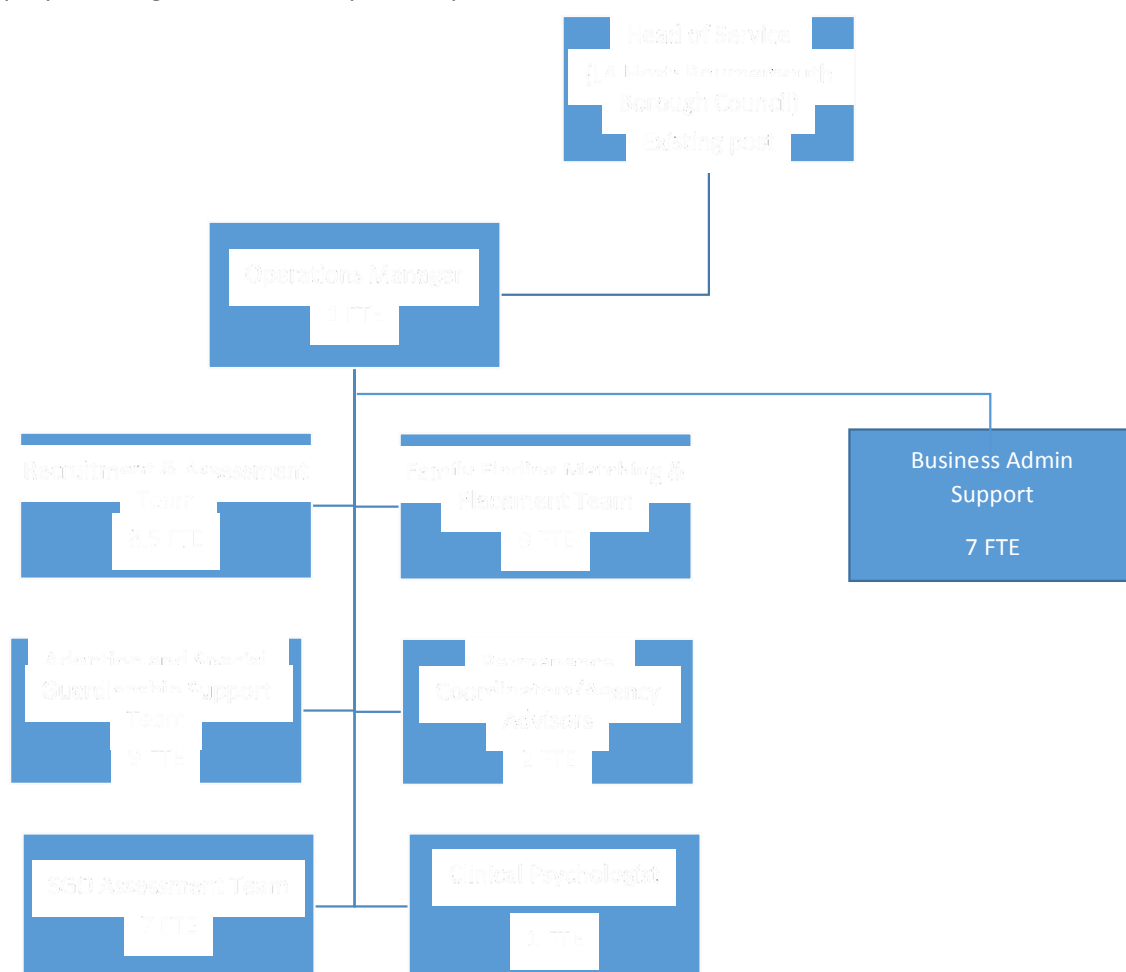
Practice improvements that will be delivered through the implementation of new ways of working can be found in Appendix B. Aspire Adoption will seek to explore further sources of funding to work jointly with the VAA, for example, in the areas of Early Permanence and adoption support to design and deliver practice improvements.

3.1.2 Additional areas of service delivery

As part of existing partnership working to deliver practice improvements across the agencies, work is already underway on integrating services prior to the implementation of the new agency, including prospective adopter preparation training across all three LAs and Families for Children, joint adopter recruitment activity and establishing joint Adoption Panel arrangements across all three local authorities.

3.2 OVERVIEW OF THE PROPOSED RAA ORGANIZATION

Approximately 60 Local Authority staff, many of whom are part time therefore a greater number than the full time equivalent (FTE) posts, would become part of Aspire Adoption to deliver these services across Dorset: The proposed organisation for Aspire Adoption is:



Two new roles would be created in the establishment of the new organisation:

The **Operations Manager** is expected to provide leadership and vision for the continuous development of Aspire Adoption, leading the strategic planning, development and management of all aspects of Aspire Adoption to ensure the delivery of high quality, effective and legally compliant Adoption & Special Guardianship services. They will manage the operational relationship with Local Authorities through interaction at Service Management level. An ability to work in a transformation role will be essential as part of this role to drive the practice improvement and cultural change required to deliver these.

The **Permanence Coordinators/Agency Advisers** (two posts) will be co-located with Child Care teams in the three LAs to identify children for adoption at the earliest opportunity and work closely with LA child care social workers throughout the permanence and adoption process. They will provide quality assurance and advice to the Agency Decision Maker (ADM) and act as Agency Adviser to the Adoption Panel.

Other roles within the RAA related to team management, social workers, family support practitioners and administration support staff will be included in the organisation. In designing the organisational structure, we have not simply consolidated the costs of the current Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole Adoption services, but have designed and shaped the RAA using the combined experience of managing adoption services across the local authority and voluntary sector. The operational staff numbers have been determined to meet the anticipated demands of the service and ensure the ability to deliver and sustain practice improvement to the benefit of children, adopters and others who benefit from adoption services.

More detail on the responsibilities of operational teams can be found in Appendix C and more detailed work on mapping existing staff to the teams in the new staffing structure will form part of the HR Work Stream activities during implementation.

3.3 PROPERTY AND IT IMPLICATIONS

The project team have been working with property representatives from all LAs to determine options on existing premises that may be available and suitable as a central location for the RAA operational base. Adoption team staff are currently located in multiple sites across the region. Bournemouth staff are based in the North Bournemouth Local Office, Dorset staff are based in Monkton Park, Dorchester, and Poole staff are based at offices in Commercial Road, Poole.

Aspire Adoption will be “headquartered” in a single location, the preferred option for which is Kinson Hub, with access to existing office bases across the county for staff and service users. The service covers the county of Dorset and a high degree of mobile working is anticipated to make the most efficient use of staff time.

Premises costs have assumed that Aspire Adoption can be accommodated within existing LA premises.

The relocation of at least some staff from their current working base to a new location will be required to meet the needs of the organisation as a regional agency.

Decisions on premises enables the IT Work Stream to set out the detailed IT options and costs available for the new organisation.

3.4 HR IMPLICATIONS AND ACTIVITIES

Potential implications for staff and the organisation and activities that will need to be addressed in the implementation project plan include (but are not limited to):

- Some relocation of staff from their current working base to a new location is expected. Location is a key concern for staff and there will need to be a fair approach for all staff in determining working arrangements;
- Development of job descriptions and person specifications for new roles and subsequent job evaluation;
- Recruitment and selection activities for new roles;
- Appropriate processes will need to be followed in order to populate the staffing structure in the new organisation;
- HR and Payroll administration activities will need to be completed; □ Training and support for new ways of working in a single agency; □ Establishing plans for ongoing professional development.

A work stream for HR has already been established with representatives from the 3 LAs involved in the project to date. Further work will be undertaken by the HR work stream to consider the advantages and disadvantages of transferring staff under the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) regulations (TUPE) or by using secondment arrangements. A clear HR Work Stream project plan will be set up to ensure that all partners carry out their responsibilities with regards to the legal requirements. This will include exchange of information on the impact of the transfer on the affected staff, any measures being proposed by the four agencies and a due diligence exercise to ascertain the numbers, roles and terms and conditions of the transferring staff. A formal consultation process with recognised Trade Unions will need to be undertaken by all the partner employer(s) for all staff affected by the transfer; this will form part of the HR Work Stream project plan.

3.5 DATA AND INFORMATION

Data and Information will be required for the day to day operation and management of the RAA. Management Information will be generated automatically from core systems where possible. Information is required to be presented to the RAA Management team, Ofsted, Local Authorities including senior management teams and elected members, the Adoption Leadership Board, the Department for Education and other partners.

3.6 COMMUNICATIONS, MARKETING AND PR

Marketing and recruitment campaigns to attract new adopters, particularly for the harder to place priority children is of paramount importance to the success of Aspire Adoption. For the purposes of this business case, it is assumed that ongoing marketing and PR costs would be similar to those of Families for Children (FFC) and will be provided from staff within Aspire or bought in on an “as needs” basis.

Implementation funding proposals to the DfE have included costs to develop a logo and brand for Aspire Adoption as the umbrella name for the regional agency. There is learning from other shared services implementation programmes that there is power in a strong brand as a way of uniting staff, being the precursor of a good service and for recognition and reputation management.

3.7 PROPOSED GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS AND LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

Adoption Services

The provision of an adoption service is a statutory requirement and the Council is required to monitor the provision of adoption services.

The Adoption and Children Act 2002 provides the structure for an adoption service. Under section 3 of the Adoption and Children Act 2002, each Council must continue to maintain within its area an adoption service designed to meet the needs of children who may be adopted, their parents, natural parents and former guardians.

These services are referred to as the 'adoption service', meaning either a local authority or a registered adoption society (section 2(1) of the Adoption and Children Act 2002).

Delegation of Functions

The development of a Regional Adoption Agency will not absolve each local authority of its statutory responsibilities, but will allow for certain functions to be delegated to facilitate the operation of a regional adoption agency model. Legal Services representatives from each of the three local authorities are engaged in a work stream to assist with developing the legal framework for the design and delivery of the new service, and independent legal advice has been sought to help inform discussions about potential delivery models for the new agency.

Where an administrative arrangement is agreed, the local authorities may delegate certain functions to another authority, to a specific officer or to a Joint Committee under Local Government Act 1972 (the "LGA 1972"). In addition to the administrative arrangement, or alternatively on its own, an inter authority agreement (an "IAA") will exist between the authorities which will identify the Lead Authority to host the Regional Adoption Agency and document the agreed arrangements.

Section 101 of the LGA 1972, allows for one authority to arrange for the discharge of their functions by another authority. It is also possible for local authorities to establish a Joint Committee, to which the authorities may delegate functions.

Withdrawal of Delegated Functions

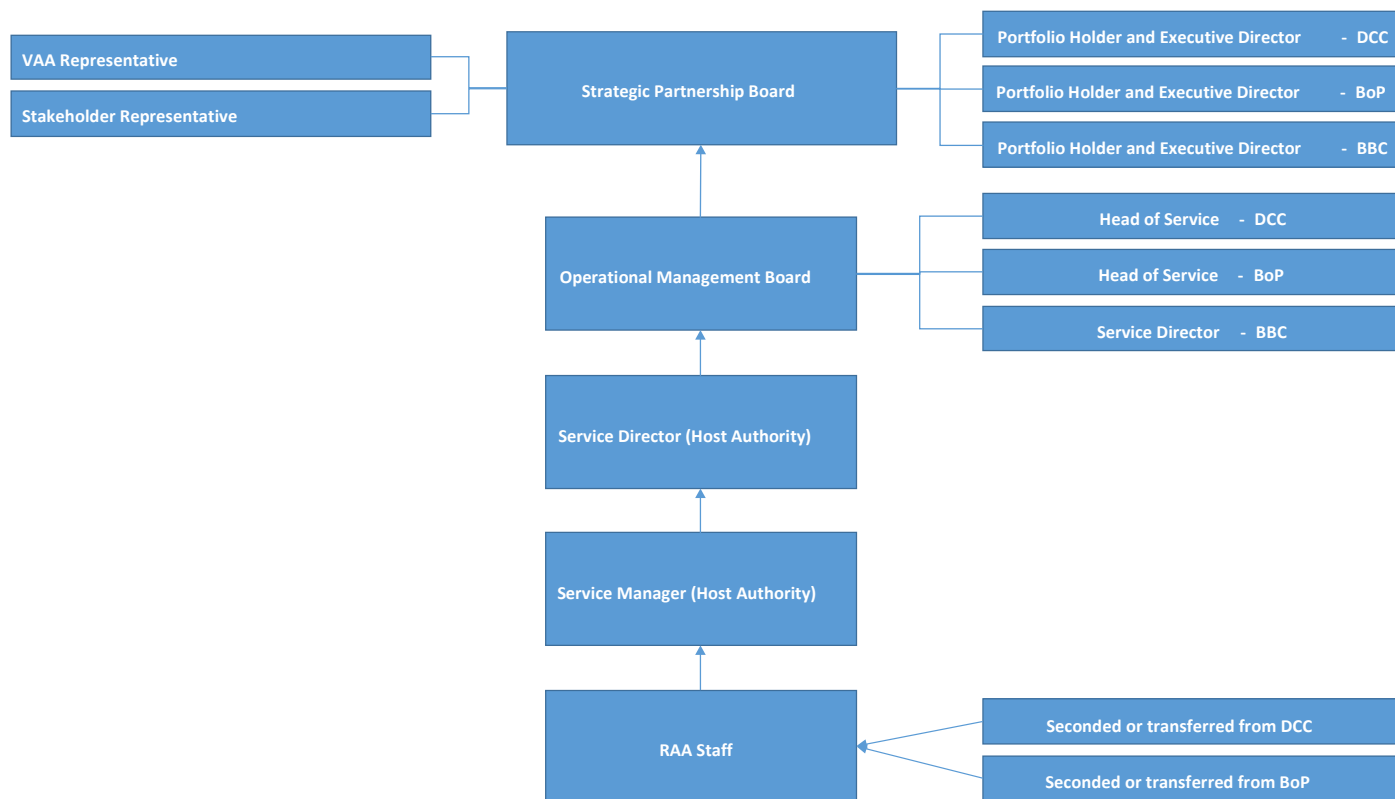
Whether a local authority decides to delegate its functions to another local authority, or to a Joint Committee it has established with one or more other local authorities, section 102 of the LGA 1972 provides for any of the participating authorities to decide to withdraw the delegated powers, and no longer participate in the Joint Committee (where relevant).

Option 1: Delegation of Function to a Local Authority

Where a function is delegated to another local authority, being the host authority, the host authority will become responsible for the performance of that function in accordance with the terms of the IAA; the governance arrangements will remain relatively informal, but will need to be agreed between the three authorities and likewise documented in the IAA.

For example, the performance of the function would likely be overseen by the host authority's service director / service head for Children's Social Care with an agreed model for reporting back regularly to each of the other authority's heads or directors of service and, where necessary, to the relevant scrutiny panel of each participating authority.

Further reporting arrangements to an informal strategic partnership board (the “**Board**”), perhaps comprising the relevant executive officer and Cabinet member for each authority, would also need to be established and might meet on a regular basis to oversee and approve the budget setting and annual business plan, and to review the strategic direction of the shared service model.



This means that day-to-day operational decisions will be taken by the host authority and that other ‘reserved’ decisions (perhaps of a strategic nature), would need to be referred to the Board. As participants on the Board, each authority would need to make its own decision and therefore the Board could only act by unanimous agreement of the three authorities. The Board would only be able to make decisions to the extent that the members and officers on the Board have the requisite authority from their appointing local authority. Certain decisions referred to the Board will then likely need to be referred back to each of the three authorities for further consideration and to the extent that the members of the Board do not have authority to make the decisions before them.

Option 2: Delegation of Function to a Joint Committee

Where the function is delegated to a Joint Committee, comprising elected members from each of the participating authorities, the Joint Committee can take a decision on behalf of each of the participating authorities (subject to the powers delegated to it by each such authority). This means that any decisions need only be taken once, by the Joint Committee, and are binding on each participating authority, rather than being taken separately in each participating authority. However, whilst this model can lead to more streamlined decision-making and oversight of the delivery of the shared service in accordance with an IAA, it can in practice be difficult to agree the scope of the delegation to the Joint Committee and how decisions will be made by the Joint Committee.

A Joint Committee would not negate the requirement for a host authority which would in any event be needed for the purpose of entering into contracts and employing staff.

Following consideration of each of Options 1 and 2, it is recommended that the authorities proceed with Option 1 above and that the relevant functions are delegated to Bournemouth Borough Council, as host authority.

Role of the VAA and Stakeholder Groups

Administrative arrangements as set out in Options 1 and 2 above do not readily lend themselves to the designation of a clearly defined role for one or more voluntary adoption agencies as the legislation which underpins the delegation of functions to either another local authority, or to a Joint Committee, is only applicable to local authorities and does not envisage external participation (save where there is a joint committee solely responsible for the discharge of non-executive functions).

However, the involvement of a voluntary adoption agency could be underpinned by a contract for services, to include the provision of strategic advice. Alternatively, the governance arrangements could recognise the role of voluntary adoption agencies and incorporate a requirement for the Board to consult with a panel comprising one or more voluntary adoption agencies (perhaps limited to matters other than those relating to financial matters, or those where all or a particular voluntary adoption agency has a conflict of interest). A similar role could be created for stakeholder representatives in relation to certain matters.

Further Advice

Further legal advice required in relation to the implementation of the hosted model will include:

- advice on the administrative arrangements and associated governance model;
- advice in relation to the transfer or secondment of staff and related employment matters;
- advice in relation to the use of assets, including property;
- advice in relation to the public procurement requirements and relevant exemptions;
- advice in relation to public consultation requirements;
- future proofing the arrangements to account for any local government reorganisation, participation by additional local authorities and dissolution of the RAA.

4 FINANCIAL ASSESSMENT

This section sets out the results of the financial analysis and modelling of operational options (e.g. operating locations, organizational structures). It also shows project costs and funding.

4.1 PROJECT COSTS

Proposed Funding Source	Amount (£k)	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
Department for Education RAA Programme Funding	368.3	134.2	234.1	0.0
Dorset County Council	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Bournemouth Borough Council	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
The Borough of Poole	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0

Funding TOTAL	368.3	134.2	234.1	0.0
Project Costs TOTAL	368.3	134.2	234.1	0.0

As shown above the total costs of the project are being funded by the DfE. The Local Authorities do not have to cover any costs of implementation, but do have to cover the ongoing costs and risks of Aspire Adoption which are covered in the sections below.

4.2 FINANCIAL MODEL

The Financial Modelling of Aspire Adoption has been developed over time working through the different iterations of an LATC option and a LA hosted option. The financial costs of the LATC option were found to be significantly higher than the available budget from the 3 Local Authorities so this option has now been discounted. The modelling behind the alternative LA hosted option has been presented here.

Current Budget Available from the Three Local Authorities

The total budget available from the three Authorities is as follows. These amounts have been developed with each authority in turn and were agreed by the Management Board;

Existing Budgets Revised – December 2016		
Authority	Budgets	Current Budget Proportions %
Bournemouth	752,070	36.9%
Poole	365,600	18.0%
Dorset	918,300	45.1%
Total	2,035,970	100.0%

These budgets have been developed from examining the current Adoption service budgets and then adding allocations for SGO assessment and increases in volumes due to Case Management transferring at different times. They have been adjusted where required to make the budgets comparable, for example, as Poole reflect the costs of their pension provision differently to Bournemouth and Dorset, a change has been made to reflect this for comparability purposes.

The adjusted budget proportions shown above have then been tested against an average of 6 different budget/cost drivers for the new RAA which included

- 1) Average number of Adoption Assessments
- 2) Adoption Support Case Loads

- 3) Total Adoption Activity
- 4) Transfer of Case Responsibility and SGO Assessments
- 5) Child Population 0 – 10
- 6) Proportions of Looked After Children (LAC) numbers

The average proportions calculated from the above six cost drivers were then compared to the budget proportions, the calculated proportions based on the cost drivers were found to be within 1.3% of the current budget proportions, therefore suggesting that the adjusted budget proportions appear appropriate to use as the basis for the funding formula of the new LA hosted agency.

New costs of running the RAA

The costs of running a LA hosted RAA have been examined and are shown in detail in Appendix D. Detailed budget assumptions have been made for the 2017/2018 financial year, and these costs have been projected forwards over an additional 4 years based on known and estimated inflation indicators.

Appendix D shows the detailed budget workings of the RAA, this has been summarised below showing the total running costs and the funding. There is an assumed shortfall on funding where the inflation particularly on salaries grows the costs over time, as well as the increase in future years to balance the Interagency fee expenditure with the income.

Inflation assumptions are also shown in Appendix D. In the majority of the cases it has been assumed that there will be no inflation increases added, and any increases in costs will have to be absorbed within the service. Inflation has been assumed on salary growth and on some supplies and services budgets only. This approach mirrors the standard approach taken by all 3 Local Authorities in setting their budgets.

The table below shows that in the first financial year 2017/2018 (assumed a full year for comparability) that there is sufficient funding available to cover the costs of the RAA. In later years there are shortfalls in funding due to growth in salary costs and equalising Interagency Fee placement costs with income received. The level of shortfall is dependent on a number of factors and could be reduced particularly if the historic surplus of Interagency income to expenditure were to continue.

Running costs and funding of RAA 2017/2018 to 2021/22					
	2017/2018 (assuming full financial year)	2018/2019	2019/2020	2020/2021	2021/2022
Total Running costs of new RAA excluding Indirect recharges	2,035,970	2,076,500	2,095,210	2,114,110	2,133,210
Total Funding Available - LA Contributions assumed frozen	-2,035,970	-2,035,970	-2,035,970	-2,035,970	-2,035,970

Future Shortfall	0	40,530	59,240	78,140	97,240
Assumed savings required through efficiencies	0	-40,530	-59,240	-78,140	-97,240
Percentage Equivalent future savings required (In-year)	0.0%	2.0%	0.9%	0.9%	0.9%
Percentage Equivalent future savings required (cumulative)	0.0%	2.0%	2.8%	3.7%	4.6%

There are broadly two ways these shortfalls can be met, and these options were taken to the Management Board on the 20th December 2016;

- 1) Request an inflation increase in the contribution levels from the 3 Local Authorities. For example, asking for the 1% salary inflation to be added to the base contributions levels would have the effect of adding a total of £73k of cumulative budget increase, which would be sufficient to deal with the majority of the budget increases. Alternatively examining the current Budget contributions from each authority to look at upfront increases in contribution levels. The Management Board considered this option, however, given the general funding issues facing all three councils increasing the contributions at this stage either for 2017/2018 or agreeing future inflation growth in advance is not supported by the Management Board.
- 2) Meet shortfall in contributions in future years by making efficiencies. The total amount of savings required in each financial year in order to deliver these savings is relatively small at a cumulative total across the 5 years of 4.8% of the budget or between 0.9% and 2% per annum. Given the service will be merged and will have a wider scope there are some further opportunities for making efficiencies in bringing the services together. All other services within the Councils are having to make similar efficiencies. This option is the preferred option by the Management Board and has been built into the Business case accordingly.

Whilst the decision of the Management Board was to support making future efficiencies to deal with the potential for future shortfalls, there will be a mechanism for Aspire Adoption to review future budgets both on an annual basis and further ahead. The future operating Management Board for Aspire Adoption will be requested to set a balanced budget for the following year, and both working budgets and the contribution levels for the forthcoming year will be reviewed and the levels set. As part of the business planning process for Aspire and in light of changing requirements for interagency fees and other future developments, funding arrangements will have to be considered regularly and the mechanisms for changes to funding will be built into the partnership and funding agreements before go live.

4.2.1 Financial Assumptions

The Financial Assumptions made in the figures produced for the Draft Business Case are:

Staffing Models

A number of separate staffing models have been developed throughout the development of the business case covering different scenarios of a LATC and a LA hosted option and different scopes of the RAA i.e. including SGO assessments. In all the models developed, an estimate of the salaries has been taken using a combination of Bournemouth grading where appropriate and estimates based on previous experience for posts that are currently not graded. The higher end of the grading has been used in all cases for prudence.

The final presented staffing structure for the LA hosted option comprises 43.5 FTE posts, and the total staffing budget this would require is £1.815m.

The following other assumptions have been made when building the Draft Financial Model, covering the running costs of the RAA, which are broadly equivalent to current Local Authority budgets, new costs of the RAA not currently being incurred by any of the Local Authorities, and finally support service costs which are being incurred in the Local Authorities.

Interagency Fees

The future of the interagency fee is not clear however it is assumed a nationally agreed scheme where approved adopters need to be bought from other authorities and sold to other authorities will have to exist in the future.

With the combination of the three local authorities into the new RAA there is some potential to increase the scope for trading with other Local Authorities and other RAAs. This is particularly as the proposed RAA is a demonstrator project, so other RAAs will not be in existence as quickly. The assumptions were originally to assume the new organisation will have to purchase on average six adopters through an interagency fee scheme and will be able to sell on ten approved adopters. Upon further review and examination of the risks involved with trading, particularly with some of the guidance being sent from the DfE this net income position has been reduced to only a net gain of circa one placement. The total budget available would now be able to purchase nine placements and assumes ten can be sold in any one year. Therefore, in the financial model for 2017/2018 there is a slight net income which is able to offset other expenditure. Modelling has been developed for the 2018/2019 year onwards to show the impact of a net nil budget position, i.e. that the income budget matches the expenditure budget, and this has been reflected in the business case. Savings would have to be delivered in the future years in order to accommodate this net nil trading position. Further work would be required once the RAA goes live to look at whether the funding for purchasing of placements is required to be increased further beyond the level of interagency income, which again would require further savings/increased funding in order to be able to be delivered.

Services not in scope of Aspire Adoption – Including Adoption Allowances and SGO payments

Through the development of the Business case there has been a thorough review of the current adoption services that are in or out of scope of Aspire Adoption. The decision has been that the payments already agreed and future payments to be decided for adoption allowances and other forms of adoptive parent financial support, and SGO payments (not the assessments) are all out of scope of the RAA. This has an impact on the budgets as it assumes the risks of overspending in this area remain with the existing authorities and do not transfer to Aspire Adoption. This will create a potential issue as the RAA hosted by Bournemouth BC may end up deciding or influencing the financial cost of a package of support where the costs fall on Dorset CC or The Borough of Poole. To alleviate this risk a protocol will be developed as part of the Funding/Partnership agreement to limit this risk.

Funding Agreements

Following the agreement of the Business Case a detailed funding agreement as part of or separate to the partnership agreement will have to be drawn up. This will hold financial information on the funding levels by the 3 Local Authorities. Subject to further changes to the budget, particularly over the pension contribution levels, the budget and percentage contributions levels are assumed to be shown above. These percentages currently are Dorset CC 45.1%, Bournemouth BC 36.9% and Borough of Poole 18.0%. Once these percentages are finalised and agreed in the funding agreement they will form the basis of the financial dealings between the 3 authorities

Aspire Adoption Earmarked Reserve for Underspends

As discussed and agreed through the Management Board there is a proposal to set up an Earmarked RAA Reserve held by Bournemouth Borough Council on behalf of the other authorities as the host authority. This would be used initially to capture any underspending areas, particularly if there were higher than anticipated receipts of Interagency fee income. This scenario is possible but there are a number of uncertainties around the future levels of the interagency fee income. The government have scaled back on the support available through the Interagency Fee Grant, and this grant is planned to cease entirely by March 2017. If there were future surpluses from underspending budgets they would initially fall into the earmarked reserve. This would protect the funding of the Aspire Adoption and be able to be utilised towards future budget pressures, as well as being set aside for the future aspirations of the RAA becoming an LATC. If funding was building up over time, without a suitable use, the funding could be returned to the Partner Local Authorities under the provisions of the Funding/Partnership agreement.

Risk Share on Overspends

The setting up of Aspire Adoption as a new body brings a number of risks for overspending. Perhaps the biggest area of future unknown costs is around interagency fees. There is a lot of uncertainty over the future demand both for purchasing placements and selling placements and so there is a potential future pressure that the RAA will have to pay more in interagency fees than the corresponding income received for selling placements. There are also other risks of overspends for example if the demand for delivering SGOs and adoption assessments were to exceed the available staffing available. Whilst this is a lower risk and more easily managed there are still a number of risks that could lead to overspends for Aspire Adoption. If there were overspends in the service, then these would initially fall onto Bournemouth Borough Council as host authority. As a partnership however the risk of overspends will have to be shared between all partners through the funding agreement. Depending on the level of overspend the pressure could be absorbed by transferring funds from the Aspire Adoption earmarked reserve, or could be rolled forward to be dealt with in the following year if seen as a small and short term issue. Ultimately however if these sources were not possible then the shortfall would have to be met by the 3 partners in the agreed percentage shares. This provision would be made explicit in the Funding/Partnership agreements when they are developed in the run up to Aspire Adoption going live.

NEW COSTS ARISING FROM THE MOVE TO THE RAA/SUPPORT SERVICES COSTS

Premises costs

The original assumptions were for one central base in the County, with enough space to accommodate up to 60 individuals, taking into account the number of part time staff (utilising hot-desking if required). Base rental costs were assumed using Kinson Hub as a benchmark which would equate to circa £60k costs to include rent, utilities, minor repairs, National Non-Domestic Rates (NNDR) if applicable, grounds maintenance, cleaning, refuse disposal etc. This figure included some contingency in case no suitable former Local Authority site was available and the RAA decided to rent a new property externally.

After further consideration by the Management Board it has been agreed that Aspire Adoption will have a Headquarters, the preferred option for which is Kinson Hub. This HQ would absorb a large increase in the current members of staff and therefore will require investment and development to become the flagship site. It is also likely that existing staff would have to move out of the chosen site in order to accommodate the growth in numbers. In the business case it has been assumed this would require a formal rental charge.

All operational staff will have access to IT equipment in order to facilitate mobile working and be able to 'touch down' at other office bases in the three Local Authorities. This will ensure that Aspire Adoption remains connected to the LA child care teams, and has access to local premises for staff and to meet with service users, also reducing travelling time and costs for staff. The opportunity for staff to 'touch down' at existing Local Authority sites has been assumed to be provided by the three local authorities at no additional cost to the RAA. This reflects the overall reduction in usage of the existing buildings in the two non host authorities.

ICT costs

Assuming the RAA will be absorbed into the host authority ICT network and support arrangements there are a number of direct costs that would be incurred by the host authority from taking on additional members of staff. These include Microsoft and other software licenses, Photocopier rentals, as well as setting aside a fund to replace equipment. These direct additional costs have been estimated at £25k. The costs of providing general technician helpdesk support and contributions to the overall costs of providing the ICT network have been assumed to be provided by the host authority at no additional cost to the RAA, but would incur a notional £35k charge. This reflects that there should be no significant cost to ICT services existing contracts for absorbing approximately an additional 30- 40 people.

HR and Payroll

Under the LA hosted option it is assumed the host authority will absorb the costs of taking additional members of staff into its Payroll and HR services. One off set up costs to bring the new members of staff onto the system initially are covered by the implementation funding from the DfE.

Financial Services

It is assumed that Finance Support under an LA hosted model would primarily be covered Indirectly through adding to existing arrangements for Creditors, Debtors, External Audit, Internal Audit, Closing of Accounts, Insurance administration etc. However, it is also assumed that the host authority will have an increase in workload in direct Accountancy and Finance Support, of one day per week.

Insurance

For the purposes of the Business Case it is assumed the host authority will not incur any additional costs for insurance and can absorb the costs of ensuring the new RAA is fully covered by Insurance.

Legal costs

The assumption in the Business Case is that the bulk of the Legal and Democratic costs remain in the Local Authorities as part of the Looked After Children process not the adoption process. An allowance for only a low level of bought in legal support has been made to reflect that the costs would largely fall on the Local Authorities as they do now. The funding agreement to be developed will need to include this point clearly.

Pension Liabilities

For the Business Case, it has been assumed that all future pension cost liabilities would transfer to the RAA if staff are TUPE'd over but any past deficit liabilities would remain with the Local Authorities as per previous arrangements made for Tricuro and the Youth Offending Service transfers. Should it be agreed that staff are seconded into Aspire then both the future and past pension cost liabilities would remain with the three Local Authorities. Payments into the pension fund and the full Pension impacts would need to be discussed further

with the Actuaries of the scheme and the rates are likely to be changed before 'go live'. For the sake of the business case the Bournemouth contribution figures of circa 20% have been included in the Salaries costings to match the current level of contributions from the 3 Local Authorities. This area will be picked up as part of both the Finance and HR work streams.

Redundancies

It has been assumed for the Business case purposes that redundancy costs, should they arise, would not fall on the ongoing running costs of the RAA. It has been assumed that if there were any redundancy costs these would be picked up by the Local Authorities. Future redundancies beyond Go-live would need to be agreed through the Management Board and so there would have to have funding packages put in place to ensure the Host authority does not unduly bear the costs of prior service costs of redundancy. Provision for treatment of redundancies will have to form part of the partnership and Funding arrangements.

4.2.2 Implementation Plans and Project Funding Requirements

The attached high level Project Plan (Appendix E) sets out the activities over the next planned phase of the project assuming approval is given by LA Cabinets and FFC's Board of Trustees by February 2017. It sets out a plan for Aspire Adoption to be formed by July 2017 with the following in place:

- Governance arrangements in place
- Staff TUPE'd or seconded into the host organization
- Operational Manager recruited
- Operational premises and IT systems available
- New branding and identity established
- Staff trained in new ways of working
- Benefits realisation baseline established for ongoing performance monitoring

During an estimated one month handover period following 'go live', the project team will work with the management of the new RAA to establish a first-year plan to transition into a successful enterprise.

5 COMMISSIONING ARRANGEMENTS AND OTHER RELATIONSHIPS

Section 3.1.1 above and Appendix B sets out potential areas for VAA to partner with Aspire to support service delivery of the following areas:

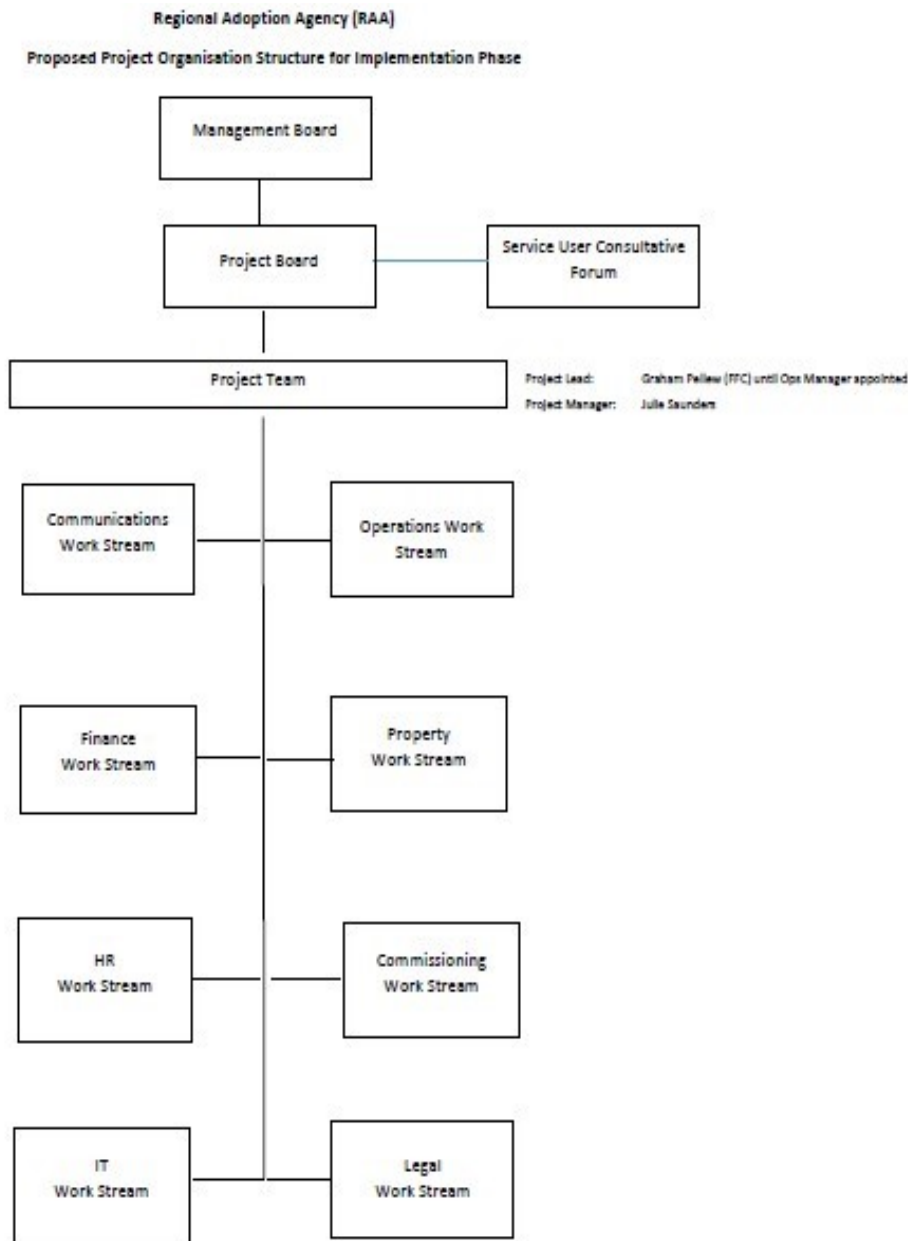
- Targeted recruitment activity focusing on Early Permanence and targeted assessments for priority children
- Partner (non-agency) adoption assessments
- Administration and management of the RAA Adoption Panel
- Training of prospective adopters both pre and post approval and placement
- Specialist adoption training
- Specialist practical or therapeutic support services for children and families post placement and post order
- Adoption counselling and services to adopted adults
- Continued provision of VAA families

As part of the implementation phase of the project, the Operations Lead will work with the Commissioning lead to review these areas of work to determine which of these services could be delivered by the VAA to achieve service improvements at best value. Ad hoc partnership work will also be formalised and the most appropriate commissioning and procurement arrangements will be determined during this period.

6 PROJECT MANAGEMENT APPROACH

6.1 PROJECT ORGANISATION

This section sets out the project organisation and actions which will be undertaken to support the achievement of intended deliverables. As part of the Scope and Define phase of the RAA initiative, a project organisation and project governance arrangements are already well established. It is expected that the project organisation structure will remain in place, subject to modifications of project team members and resource allocation to the project work streams below:



Key roles in the team include:

Project Lead – to own the overall approach to project delivery and ensure that the project meets its objectives and expected outcomes. It is anticipated that the current project lead (from FFC) will hand over to an individual who will eventually take on the senior operational management post within the new RAA.

Project Manager - responsible for overseeing and managing the overall RAA project plan on behalf of the Project Lead to ensure that the desired project objectives are delivered.

Based on our previous experience of running similar projects we plan to utilise a work stream model across the following areas:

- Communications
- Finance
- Human Resources
- Information Technology
- Legal
- Operations
- Procurement/Commissioning
- Property

Each work stream will have leads who will be accountable for managing individual work stream project activities and ensuring the delivery of scheduled work stream outputs. Each work stream will also be assigned a representative from the Project Board to act as a sponsor. Deliverables and accountabilities will be set out in individual work stream terms of reference.

The **Operational work stream lead** has a crucial role in ensuring that the planned practice improvements are designed into new ways of working as well as representing the business in non-Operational work streams such as HR and IT. On this basis, an individual has been seconded out of day to day operational duties for the implementation phase of the project until a permanent Operations Manager is appointed.

We anticipate maintaining project governance through the **Management Board** (membership includes Director of Children's Services, Heads of Service and FFC's Chief Executive) and **Project Board** (Adoption Team Managers, Service Managers and an FFC Practice Manager).

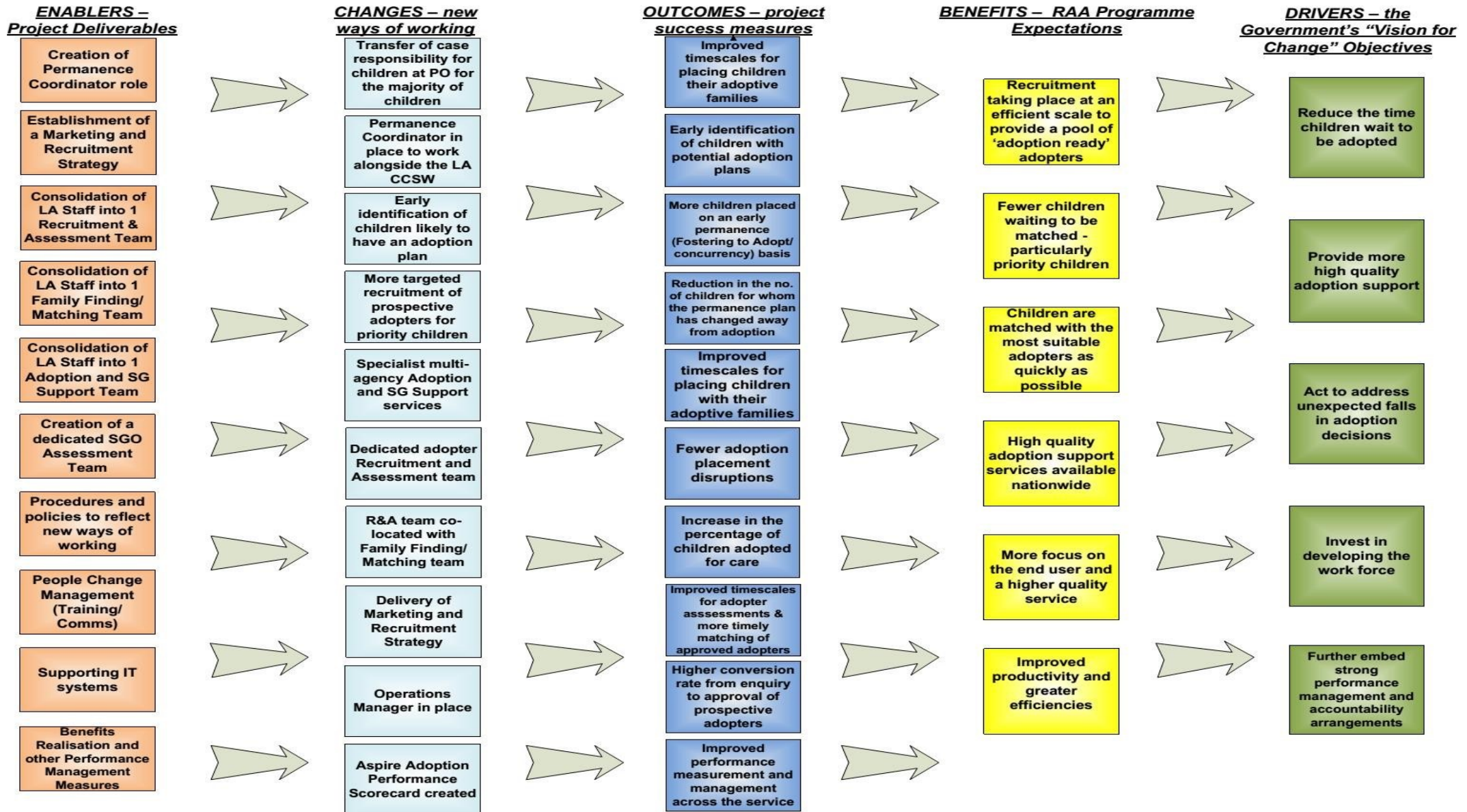
A key area of activity role in the project will be change management. Our financial plan includes costs for a **Change Manager** to support the project team to be successful by building support, addressing resistance and developing the required knowledge and ability to implement the change (i.e. managing the 'people' side of the change). Part of this individual's role will be to develop a Change Management Strategy to ensure the continued effective engagement with all internal and external stakeholder groups that may impact or be impacted by any changes as a result of implementing the new agency.

6.2 PROJECT MANAGEMENT ASSUMPTIONS

These include:

- Project leadership and continued support of dedicated project management to oversee and direct panagency work streams across Comms, Finance, HR, IT, Legal, Operations, Commissioning and Property;
- Required project funding outlined in the implementation proposal submitted to the DfE is made available;
- Processes for risk management and escalation of issues is maintained through existing project governance arrangements;
- Management Board and Project Board members can provide the time commitment to provide challenge and support to resolve issues where required;
- From the outset of the implementation phase of the project, all stakeholders—and in particular, work stream leads—understand their roles and responsibilities within this project as well as the interdependencies across the work streams;
- Work stream sponsors, leads and members are available to delivery of the activities and tasks to achieve work stream deliverables as set out in individual work stream terms of reference.

APPENDIX A – BENEFITS DEPENDENCY NETWORK DIAGRAM



7 APPENDIX B - PRACTICE IMPROVEMENTS DELIVERED THROUGH NEW WAYS OF WORKING

Practice Improvements – Recruitment & Assessment

Practice Improvements being introduced through the RAA are . . .

- The RAA recruitment strategy will be prepared and reviewed on a regular basis to ensure that recruitment of adopters is targeted on the children for whom the L/As are making adoption plans.
- Extensive use of social media and on-line marketing, alongside more traditional advertising and promotional activity to ensure that there is wide coverage of the need for adoptive parents for a wide range of children.
- Assessments of prospective adopters to be undertaken in a timely way to ensure that there is a sufficient pool of approved adopters to facilitate speedy matching, and that priority is given to those wishing to adopt children with additional needs or sibling groups. (N.B. timing of DBS completing checks on applicants needs to be improved to avoid delays. This is a particular problem in the Dorset area).
- Regular preparation training for prospective adopters to be provided to ensure that no delays occur in commencing/completing assessments. Use of in-house expertise to enhance training – DDP, Theraplay and Birth Relative support practitioners
- Post approval training to be provided to all applicants, with modules developed that can be delivered to other agencies with the potential to create an income stream.

Performance will be evaluated and monitored through . . .

- L/A tracking systems, Permanence Co-ordinator(s) and IROs
- Monitoring of source of all enquiries, and ensuring resources are targeted on the most successful approaches.
- RAA case management system to track timescales on all assessments, with management oversight by Team Manager. Target Panel dates to be identified at the outset of all assessments, with flexibility to ‘fast-track’ assessments for children currently waiting. Additional capacity to be built in to Adoption Panel agendas to enable assessments to be considered promptly when they are completed.
- Monitoring by Team Manager with additional training arranged as required. Training programmes to be regular evaluated by trainers, using service user feedback to ensure the content is relevant and appropriate.

Opportunities for VAA support would include . . .

- Targeted recruitment activity focusing on Priority Children. This has been the core business of VAAs for many years and there is an opportunity to harness VAA expertise to achieve early placements for children.
- VAA capacity to undertake priority assessments at short notice to be available.
- Training could be commissioned from a VAA - either particular modules or complete training programmes to supplement those being provided by RAA staff.

Practice Improvements being introduced through the RAA are . . .

Better and more methodical early identification of children with likely adoption plans and early involvement of workers from Aspire Adoption. This will:

- Training could be commissioned from a VAA - either particular modules or complete training programmes to supplement those being provided by RAA staff.

Practice Improvements – Permanence Planning

- help to shape and target recruitment activity within Aspire for individual children, and more generally by identifying trends in ages, family composition, level and type of need.
- allow for early identification of children for whom an Early Permanent (fostering to adopt) placement might be an option, to enable them to move to their permanent family at the earliest possible opportunity.
- ensure that the right level of direct work is undertaken with each child, dependent on their age and level of understanding, to help them to understand why they are in care, what needs to happen for decisions to be made about their future care, including a simplified explanation of the court process. The child's wishes and feelings about their current and future care can be ascertained as part of this process. Work on families can also be undertaken, to help the child to understand about different kinds of families- birth families, foster families and adoptive families. Also work to understand that families come in different shapes and sizes with a mum and a dad, two mums or two dads, or one mum or one dad. This can link back to the composition of the birth family, foster family or potential adoptive family. The direct work with the child is currently undertaken by the local authority child care social worker, who faces the competing and conflicting demands of tight court timetables and gathering evidence as to whether or not the birth family can safely care for the child, and undertaking the more planned and paced direct work essential to help prepare the child for a potential move to adoption. As a result, the direct work with the child is not always undertaken well, or in some cases at all, until the Placement Order is granted. This will be many months after a child first enters care, and when a child's anxieties and insecurities will be high. The better the child understands what is happening, the better prepared that he or she is for a move to their permanent family, and the greater chance of a successful transition and placement.
- enable work to be undertaken with foster carers and supervising social workers to ensure they are involved in and understand the family finding and matching process and time table, and the way transitions are managed. This will help them to support and manage the child's anxieties at this time.
- free up the local authority social worker to fully focus on the court work leading to the granting of a Placement Order.
- ensure that birth relatives have access to an independent worker from Aspire from the point that adoption is the plan for their child, to provide them with support and to ensure that the fullest possible information about the birth family is gathered. This will help inform the Child Permanence Report, will help with family finding for the child and with the child's life story book. It will also potentially help to set the scene for future letterbox arrangements if the birth relatives are linked with Aspire workers at this stage.

Transfer of casework responsibility to Aspire at the point of Placement order. This will:

- Ensure more timely matching because the focused family finding activity is undertaken by specialist workers not balancing the competing demands of child protection and court work as well as adoption work.
- Reduce delay in short listing potential families, arranging visits, completing paperwork for Adoption Panel for matching, and planning introductions. This is currently undertaken jointly with a local authority social worker, who is limited in availability by child protection work, court dates and deadlines.
- Provide continuity for the child, with the RAA worker undertaking the direct work with the child leading to the Placement Order continuing that work and also supporting the child through the matching process and introductions, through to placement and to Adoption Order.
- Continuity for birth relatives with a worker in Aspire separate to the local authority social worker and already known to them.

Performance will be evaluated and monitored through . . .

- Tracking systems will be set up by Aspire to monitor the journey of each child identified by the Permanence Coordinator as likely to have an adoption plan for permanence. These will monitor the progress of the child through the court and matching process through to placement and Adoption Order, and will be updated and monitored regularly in Aspire team meetings and through supervision.
- These systems will enable Aspire to provide the child's originating agency with data on an individual child's progress. Data will also be collected on disruptions prior to Adoption Order and children for whom an adoption placement is not achieved. Comparisons with performance prior to Aspire going live is already available to measure performance against.
- Data across all aspects of adoption work is also collected and collated quarterly by the Adoption Leadership Board, with headline national trends identified alongside the availability of local data. It is anticipated that this will continue once Regional Adoption Agencies are set up. This will enable comparisons with national performance and trends.
- Reporting mechanisms back from Aspire into each local authority for oversight and scrutiny by elected members every 6 months will also be set up, incorporating all of the data available.

Opportunities for VAA support would include . . .

- VAAs will continue to play an important part in providing families for children for whom Aspire are responsible. VAA involvement on the Management Board will ensure that they have knowledge of and input to discussions about trends in the characteristics of children being referred to Aspire to inform their recruitment strategy. They may be commissioned to recruit either a certain number of or type of placements each year for Aspire.
- The possibility of a VAA taking responsibility for the running of the Aspire Adoption Panel needs to be further explored in implementation, as it would provide a more independent scrutiny of adoption assessments and matches.
- The level of support and type of adoption support services needed for any particular match is an important part of the matching and placement process. VAAs may also be in a position to offer specific practical or therapeutic support services for individual children and families post placement.

Practice Improvements – Matching and Placement

Practice Improvements being introduced through the RAA are . . .

- Early identification of children through the Permanence Coordinator/Agency Adviser role and advantages in combining the 2 functions in that role.
- Early linking of the RAA worker to prepare the child and start the family finding at the earliest possible point, also creating opportunities to identify children for whom an Early Permanent (fostering for adoption) placement might be appropriate.
- Wider choice of prospective adopters from the RAA through more targeted recruitment
- Improved timescales for short listing and visiting potential families, improved standard of CPRs, and other reports for prospective adopters, Adoption Panel and ADM, as the RAA worker will have the expertise and be dedicated to the adoption process. ▫ Improved support plans due to the early involvement of the RAA

Performance will be evaluated and monitored through . . .

- RAA tracking systems
- Internal management scrutiny and oversight within the RAA
- IRO involvement in statutory reviews, QA and monitoring for each child
- Reporting mechanisms back into the LA about individual children, and overview and scrutiny by elected members ▫
Quarterly data submitted to the ALB

Opportunities for VAA support would include . . .

- VAA involvement on the Management Board
- Potential commissioning of assessments for harder to place children from VAAs or spot purchase
- Possibility of a VAA being commissioned to run the RAA Adoption Panel to be further explored
- VAA involvement in the provision of specific adoption support services

Practice Improvements – Adoption Support

Practice Improvements being introduced through the RAA are . . .

Assessment for Adoption/SG support

- Specialist transitions work
- Comprehensive support to placements
- Comprehensive information about adoption support services made available through varied formats, including detailed information online ▫ Better promotion of adoption/SG support services
- Rapid response team focused on timely response to advice and information requests
- Building on established working relationships with other agencies (e.g. LAs, CAMHS, Out of Hours) in particular in relation to Child Sexual Exploitation, missing children and safeguarding
- Maintaining contact for adoptive/SG families (If desired) following the making the adoption/SG order
- Development of 'buddy' services for adopters/SGs
- Provision of Independent Social Work services subject to agency capacity.

Adoption Support/ SG planning, delivery and review

- Establishment of multi-agency specialist teams (including social workers, psychologists, educationalist and specialist trained adoption support practitioners) providing access to 'in house' specialist services for all adopters/SGs across all RAAs.
- Locally delivered specialist services, creating efficiencies in service delivery
- Provision of a menu of services to other agencies including therapy services, training (e.g. to schools) to enable the service to grow and develop.

Specialist areas of Adoption Support

- Economies of scale are expected to enable the provision of regular and additional training and support groups for all relevant parties involved in adoption and SGs

- Centre of excellence for the provision of cost effective specialist training
- Development of core training menu to adopters and SGs
- Providing a more accessible service across the region building on current good practice delivered by the VAA to two of the LAs
- Dedicated Post Adoption Central Support works to provide comprehensive contact service ▫ Development of a comprehensive contact service to LAs.

For all stages

- Building on good practice
- Offer training opportunities to students undertaking professional training
- Investment in staff to provide career satisfaction and stability of team membership
- ICT systems that enable the appropriate sharing of information to prevent duplication and delay and to ensure the most appropriate services are offered.

Performance will be evaluated and monitored through . . .

- Reviews of Adoption Support Plans
- Operational performance measures including monitoring of waiting times for services where applicable and disruption rates ▫ Commissioning contract KPIs
- Regulatory inspections
- Service user/participant feedback/increased demand for services
- Supervision and evaluation of 'associate' providers and commissioned services

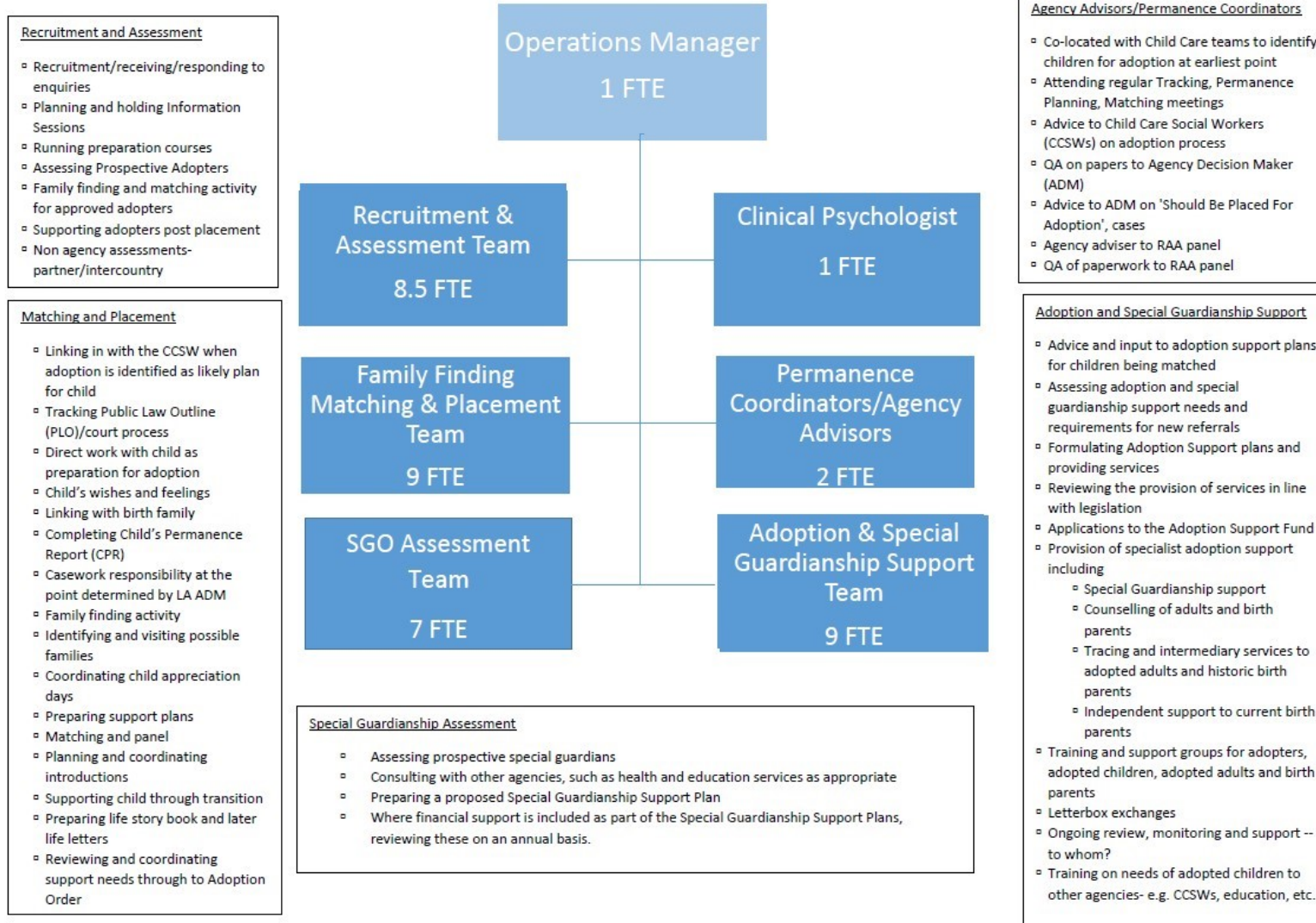
Opportunities for VAA support would include . . .

- Integration of VAA staff with specialist adoption support skills / training, e.g. through secondment

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C – PROPOSED RAA OPERATIONAL TEAM STRUCTURE



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9

D - COSTS OF RUNNING AN LA-HOSTED RAA

RAA Financial Modelling 5 year Business Case						
		RAA Costs assuming LA Hosted Model including V8C salary option				
Budget Area	Annual Inflation uplift	2017/2018 (assuming full financial year)	2018/2019	2019/2020	2020/2021	2021/2022
Running costs of the Service						
Staffing	1%	1,815,000	1,833,150	1,851,480	1,869,990	1,888,690
Vacancy Factor at 1.5%	0%	-26,930	-26,930	-26,930	-26,930	-26,930
Other Employee Costs	0%	4,300	4,300	4,300	4,300	4,300
Transport Total	0%	40,000	40,000	40,000	40,000	40,000
Mobile Phones	0%	10,800	10,800	10,800	10,800	10,800
Printing	0%	5,000	5,000	5,000	5,000	5,000
DBS Checks	0%	1,000	1,000	1,000	1,000	1,000
Subscriptions	0%	28,000	28,000	28,000	28,000	28,000
Reference Books	0%	0	0	0	0	0
Training	0%	8,000	8,000	8,000	8,000	8,000
Carer Advertising	0%	4,000	4,000	4,000	4,000	4,000
Supplies and Services General	2%	18,800	19,180	19,560	19,950	20,350
Panel Administration	0%	25,000	25,000	25,000	25,000	25,000
Interagency Fee and other 3rd Party Expenditure	0%	248,000	275,000	275,000	275,000	275,000
Interagency Fee income	0%	-275,000	-275,000	-275,000	-275,000	-275,000
Direct Support Services Costs						

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Premises Annual cost	0%	60,000	60,000	60,000	60,000	60,000
ICT Annual Cost	0%	25,000	25,000	25,000	25,000	25,000
HR Annual Cost	0%	0	0	0	0	0
Payroll Annual cost	0%	0	0	0	0	0
Finance costs	0%	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000
Commisioning of Services (e.g. from VAA)	0%	0	0	0	0	0
Ongoing Marketing & PR (first year investment required, reduced from 2nd year)	0%	10,000	5,000	5,000	5,000	5,000
Legal costs	0%	20,000	20,000	20,000	20,000	20,000
Total excluding Indirect Recharges		2,030,970	2,071,500	2,090,210	2,109,110	2,128,210

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Appendix 2 – EqIA

Equality Impact Needs Assessment



The Diversity Promise - *Better for all*

1. Title of Policy/Service/Project	Aspire Adoption - Pan Dorset Regional Adoption Agency project
2. Service Unit	Children’s Social Care
3. Lead Responsible Officer and Job Title	Heather Freeman, Operational Lead, Aspire Adoption
4. Members of the Assessment Team:	Graham Pellow, Project Lead; Julie Saunders, Project Manager; Heather Freeman, Operational Lead
5. Date assessment started:	13/12/16
6. Date assessment completed:	03/01/17

About the Policy/Service/Project:

7. What type of policy/service/project is this? (delete as appropriate) Changing

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8. What are the aims/objectives of the policy/service/project? (please include here all expected outcomes)

In June 2015, the Department for Education (DfE) published a paper, 'Regionalising Adoption,' setting out the proposals for the establishment of Regional Adoption Agencies (RAAs). The paper gave a very clear directive to local authorities that it was the expectation for all authorities to be part of a Regional Adoption Agency by 2020. The move towards the creation of Regional Adoption Agencies is led by a national agenda to better target the recruitment of prospective adopters and speed up the matching and placement of children for adoption.

Further policy statements since then continue to support the proposed reforms to adoption and outlined the provision of funding and support for the creation of RAAs. Locally it has been agreed that we will incorporate special guardianship assessment and support services into the work of the RAA.

It is proposed that a new Regional Adoption Agency (RAA), to be called Aspire Adoption, is created through combining the adoption services for the local authority areas of Bournemouth Borough Council, Dorset County Council and The Borough of Poole, working in partnership with the Voluntary Adoption Agency, Families for Children. These agencies wish to build on the success of their existing services to improve performance in meeting the needs of children who require permanence through adoption and special guardianship by bringing together the best practice from each local authority and the voluntary agency through the RAA.

9. Are there any associated services, policies or procedures? Yes

If 'Yes', please list below:

Adoption services are statutory functions of local authorities therefore all 3 local authorities involved in this project have services already in place to discharge those functions, with associated policies and procedures in place. Each local authority also has to meet reporting requirements to elected members, who provide an additional level of overview and scrutiny. In a similar way, the Voluntary Adoption Agency, Families for Children, reports back to its Board of Trustees.

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10. List the main people, or groups of people, that this policy/service/project is designed to benefit and any other stakeholders involved?

Children in need of or likely to be in need of adoptive families;

Children already adopted;

Adults who have been adopted;

Those wishing to adopt;

Those who have adopted;

Birth families affected by a family member being adopted;

Children subject to special guardianship orders;

Special guardians;

Staff working in or with Children's Social Care services including existing adoption teams across all 3 pan Dorset local authorities, and staff in Families for Children.

11. Will this policy/service/impact on any other organisation, statutory, voluntary or community and their clients/service users?

- Partner agencies across education and health and including Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS); Families for Children and other Voluntary Adoption Agencies (VAAs); Local tax payers

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Consultation, Monitoring and Research

Where there is still insufficient information to properly assess the policy, appropriate and proportionate measures will be needed to fill the data gaps. Examples include one-off studies or surveys, or holding informal consultation exercises to supplement the available statistical and qualitative data.

If there is insufficient time before the implementation of the policy to inform the EINA, specific action points will be need to be clearly set out in the action plan. Steps must include monitoring arrangements which measure the actual impact and a date for a policy review.

Consultation:

12. What involvement/consultation has been done in relation to this (or a similar) policy/service/project and what are the results?

Consultation with stakeholders is an integral part of the Regional Adoption Agency project. Consultation events have been held since January 2016 and continued stakeholder engagement has taken place through web based surveys, staff newsletters and face to face events. A Stakeholder Communications plan is in place to ensure continued effective engagement with other stakeholder groups including Executive level LA officers, Elected members, VAA Trustees, Adoption Teams, wider Children's Social Care Staff, service users and partners.

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Engagement events have taken place with over 200 participants from stakeholder groups including adults, children and young people affected by adoption; staff within Bournemouth, Poole and Dorset Children's Services, staff in Families for Children, partners in health - NHS and Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS); education via the Virtual Heads; and the court service, including the local judiciary, the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS), solicitors.

A Service User Consultative group has been set up, with an adopter as chair and two members of that group joining the Project Board in their monthly meetings, to help design and deliver the new service. Adopted adults and birth parents also have representation on the Service User Consultative group.

Analysis of the responses from service users and staff from January 2016 through to April 2016 was undertaken by a Business Change partner. The key themes which emerged were categorised into four. These were a desire for a continuity of current standards; an expectation about the level and accessibility of support; suggestions about the higher level, strategic arrangements to be included in the structure and planning of the RAA; and issues to be considered given the increase in the physical area that the agency would cover.

Future events are planned during the early part of 2017 to include further consultation with staff; with Adoption Panel members, Adoption Panel administrators, Adoption Panel chairs and Agency Advisers; with children and young people who have been adopted; and with those affected by special guardianship.

13. If you have not carried out any consultation, or if you need to carry out further consultation, who will you be consulting with and by what methods?

Not applicable

Monitoring and Research:

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14. What data, research and other evidence or information is available which is relevant to this EINA?

This EINA was completed by the operational lead for the Aspire Adoption project, who has significant experience of managing a local authority adoption service, and the project lead who is also an experienced adoption manager across the local authority and voluntary sector. The project manager from the Bournemouth Business Change team has also had input to this EINA, and has extensive experience of managing projects in both the public and private sector.

14.1 Adoption services are statutory services. Relevant legislation includes the Children Act 1989, Children Act 2004, the Adoption and Children Act 2002, and associated regulations. Also relevant is the Adoption Statutory Guidance July 2013 and Minimum Standards for Adoption Services 2014.

14.2 As part of the legal framework, reports on the performance of the local authority's adoption service are presented to elected members on the Bournemouth Borough Council's Overview and Scrutiny Panel on a regular basis. An EINA is prepared alongside.

14.3 Data on the performance of all local authority adoption services is collated by the Adoption Leadership Board (ALB) on a quarterly basis and is published on the Department for Education website at a national and individual local authority level. It includes data on the percentage of children placed for adoption with disabilities or from ethnic origins other than white British. Other data routinely collected by the ALB includes data about prospective adopters including their gender, sexual orientation and marital status.

14.4 Ofsted reports in relation to children's services including adoption services in Bournemouth, which include consideration of how well the service performs in relation to equality and diversity issues. Staff and service user feedback is part of the inspection framework. Bournemouth 2014- Single Inspection Framework
https://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/local_authority_reports/bournemouth/051_Single%20inspection%20of%20LA%20children%27s%20services%20and%20review%20of%20the%20LSCB%20as%20pdf.pdf Bournemouth 2012 - Adoption
<https://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/inspection-reports/find-inspection-report/provider/CARE/SC054957>

14.5 Publications specific to the RAA programme include 'Regionalising Adoption,' published by the Department for Education in June 2015
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/regional-adoption-agencies-programme>

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‘Adoption : A Vision for Change’, published by the Department for Education in March 2016
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/adoption-a-vision-for-change>

14.6 Full Business Case in relation to the setting up of Aspire Adoption, pan- Dorset Regional Adoption Agency January 2017, to be considered at Cabinet in January 2017.

14.7 All policies and procedures relevant to Bournemouth Children’s Social Care which are available on BIZ
(<http://biz/BusinessUnits/CSC/Pages/default.aspx>)

14.8 Bournemouth Children’s Services Plan 2016-17 (<http://biz/BusinessUnits/CSC/Pages/default.aspx>)

14.9 Children’s Social Care: Service Equality Action Plan 2015-16
(<http://www.bournemouth.gov.uk/councildemocratic/EqualityDiversity/Documents/ServiceEqualityActionPlans20152016/Childrens-Social-Care-SEAP-2015-16.pdf>)

15. Is there any service user/employee monitoring data available and relevant to this policy/service/project? What does it show in relation to equality groups?

See above re reference to Ofsted reports which include consideration of how well the service performs in relation to equality and diversity issues.

Also reference above to national and local level ALB data.

16. If there is a lack of information, what further information do you need to carry out the assessment and how are you going to gather this?

Equality and diversity issues are already integral in legislation and in monitoring the delivery of current adoption services nationally and locally. The implementation of a new delivery model for adoption services locally in the form of Aspire Adoption will not change either legislation or the need for external and internal monitoring and overview processes.

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Assessing the Impact

	Actual or potential positive benefit	Actual or potential negative outcome
17. Age	<p>There is no upper age limit to adopt, although the applicant has to be physically and mentally fit to provide a high standard of care and in recognition of the life-long nature of adoption. The legal minimum age to adopt is 21.</p> <p>Children can be adopted up to the age of 18 (19 in exceptional circumstances) though adoption is usually only considered in relation to children under the age of about 10. Moving to a RAA is expected to widen the pool of potential adopters particularly for harder to place children including those at the upper end of the usual age range to be adopted.</p> <p>Moving to a RAA will not change the current situation with regard to age with regard to other service users (adopted adults, birth parents, adoptive families) affected by adoption.</p>	

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<p>18. Disability</p>	<p>Disability is not a barrier to adopting. Any disability is assessed in terms of the potential impact of the applicant’s ability to care for a child. This will not change with a move to a Regional Adoption Agency (RAA). From the perspective of children needing adoptive families, moving to a RAA will widen the pool of potential adopters for children with more complex needs including those related to a disability, as will the opportunity for more targeted recruitment.</p>	<p>Moving toward a Regional Adoption Agency will not have any actual or potential negative outcome with regard to disability</p>
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	<p>Actual or potential positive benefit</p>	<p>Actual or potential negative outcome</p>
	<p>There are no disability related issues in respect of services to other service users affected by adoption by moving to a RAA.</p>	
<p>19. Gender</p>	<p>Prospective adopters are assessed, irrespective of gender. Female and male adopters are considered and approved as single adopters or as a couple in a relationship. There are no issues with regard to gender in respect of services to other groups affected by adoption, for example, adopted adults & birth parents. Services are open to all, and this will not change with the creation of a RAA.</p>	<p>Moving toward a Regional Adoption Agency will not have any actual or potential negative outcome with regard to gender.</p>

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<p>20. Gender reassignment</p>	<p>Prospective adopters are assessed on the basis of the care they can offer to a child through the life long relationship of adoption regardless of their gender at birth or subsequently. There are no actual or potential positive benefits seen in this respect with regard to moving to a RAA.</p>	<p>Moving toward a Regional Adoption Agency will not have any actual or potential negative outcome with regard to someone who has been gender reassigned.</p>
<p>21. Pregnancy and Maternity</p>	<p>This would not be relevant in the case of prospective adopters, but is a consideration where a birth parent may be considering adoption for her child or where adoption may be the outcome of care proceedings. Setting up the local RAA will provide opportunities for positive benefits as it will be able to offer independent and more targeted support to birth parents in need. With regard to staff who are pregnant, or on maternity leave, their terms and conditions of service will remain the same.</p>	<p>Moving toward a Regional Adoption Agency will not have any actual or potential negative outcome with regard to pregnancy or maternity.</p>

	<p>Actual or potential positive benefit</p>	<p>Actual or potential negative outcome</p>
<p>22. Marriage and Civil Partnership</p>	<p>Those who are married may adopt as may those in civil partnerships. There are no additional benefits or positives from moving to a RAA.</p>	<p>Moving toward a Regional Adoption Agency will not have any actual or potential negative outcome with regard to marriage and civil partnership.</p>

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<p>23. Race</p>	<p>Considerable efforts are already made to attract prospective adopters from a wide range of cultural and ethnic backgrounds to reflect the diverse needs of children requiring adoption. A wider pool of prospective adopters and more targeted recruitment for children from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds is seen as one of the potential positive benefits from moving to a RAA.</p>	<p>Moving toward a Regional Adoption Agency will not have any actual or potential negative outcome with regard to race.</p>
<p>24. Religion or Belief</p>	<p>Applications to become adopters are encouraged from all religious and faith groups. Few birth parents are themselves of active faith backgrounds but where they are, we try to find families for their children, locally or nationally, to reflect their wishes. This will not change with the implementation of the RAA.</p>	<p>Moving toward a Regional Adoption Agency will not have any actual or potential negative outcome with regard to religion or belief.</p>
<p>25. Sexual Orientation</p>	<p>Sexual orientation does not affect whether an applicant is approved to adopt or not. Bournemouth has assessed a number of same sex couples and has placed Bournemouth children with same sex prospective adopters from other adoption agencies. This will not change with the implementation of the RAA.</p>	<p>Moving toward a Regional Adoption Agency will not have any actual or potential negative outcome with regard to sexual orientation.</p>
	<p>Actual or potential positive benefit</p>	<p>Actual or potential negative outcome</p>

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	Other service users approaching the new RAA will be treated with equal respect and consideration.	
26. Any other factor/ groups e.g. socioeconomic status/carers etc	Prospective adopters are considered on their capacity to care for a child and socio economic status/carers etc would not be bars in themselves to adopting. Birth parents whose children are being adopted are often disadvantaged in society because of domestic violence, mental health problems, learning difficulties or substance misuse. Setting up the local RAA will provide opportunities for positive benefits as the agency will be a specialist adoption agency with experienced staff who will be able to offer independent and more targeted support to birth parents in need.	Moving toward a Regional Adoption Agency is not seen to have any actual or potential negative outcome with regard to socio economic status or caring responsibilities.
27. Human Rights	Human Rights legislation is adhered to when considering adoption as the plan for the child, in placing a child with adoptive parents, when assessing potential carers, & in all other aspects of adoption work. This will not change when the RAA goes live.	Moving toward a Regional Adoption Agency will not have any actual or potential negative outcome with regard to Human Rights.

Stop - Any policy which shows actual or potential unlawful discrimination must be stopped, removed or changed.

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28. If impacts have been identified include in the action plan what will be done to reduce these impacts, this could include a range of options from making adjustments to the policy to stopping and removing the policy altogether. If no change is to be made, explain your decision:

Action Plan

Include:

- What has/will be done to reduce the negative impacts on groups as identified above.
- Detail of positive impacts and outcomes
- The arrangements for monitoring the actual impact of the policy/service/project

29. Issue identified	Action required to reduce impact	Timescale	Responsible officer	Which Business Plan does this action link to e.g. Service Equality Action Plan/Team Plan
All efforts are being made to minimise disruption to staff and service users during implementation but combining the adoption services of 3 local authorities will bring challenges, and wider issues of equality and diversity could get overlooked.	Equality and diversity issues will be embedded in all work undertaken in relation to the development and revision of all policies and procedures leading up to the go live date of the new agency in July 2017, and will continue post implementation in how Aspire Adoption operates and delivers services.	During and post implementation	Aspire Adoption Operations Manager	All service specifications and other documentation in relation to the new agency.

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<p>No specific engagement so far with black and minority ethnic groups to ensure their views are taken into account in the design and delivery of services in the new organisation</p>	<p>Engagement with the Black and Minority Ethnic Children’s Services Forum</p>	<p>To be set up during implementation</p>	<p>Aspire Adoption Operations Manager</p>	<p>All service specifications and other documentation in relation to the new agency.</p>
<p>The need for more prospective adopters to widen the pool of those available to meet the needs of ‘harder to place’ children for adoptive families, particularly those from black and ethnic minority groups, different cultures and religions, with disabilities, in sibling groups.</p>	<p>All recruitment of prospective adopters to ensure that those with protected characteristics are positively encouraged to consider adopting, and that they are considered fairly and treated with respect when they do</p>	<p>During and post implementation</p>	<p>Aspire Adoption Operations Manager</p>	<p>All service specifications and other documentation in relation to the new agency.</p>